ELECTRONIC SOUND

THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC MAGAZI

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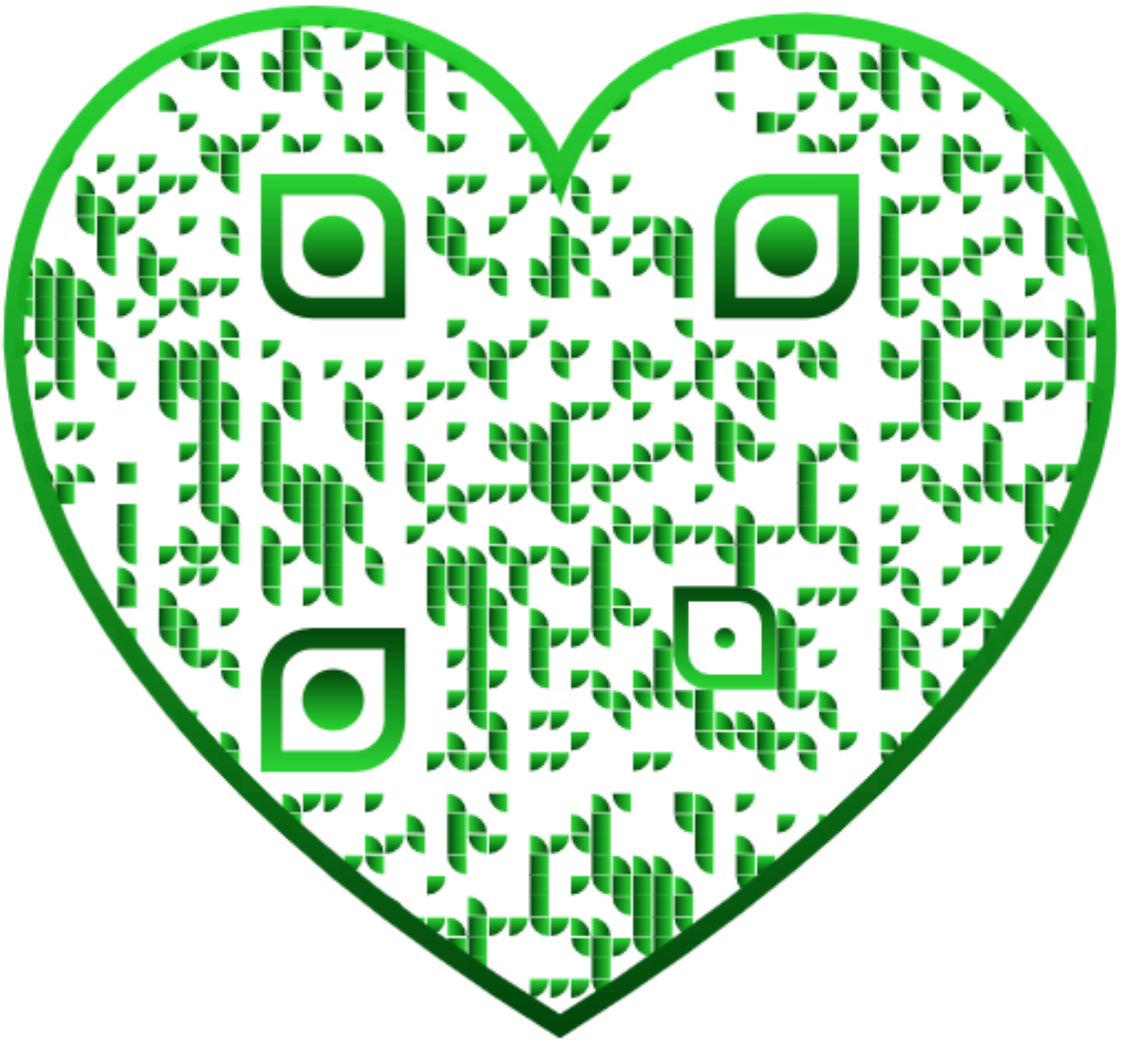
THE RADIOPHONIC WORKSHOP

THE SOUND OF DOCTOR WHO

GAZELLE TWIN / MARIA UZOR / JAMES HOLDEN / JLIN / SEXTILE / COLLEEN “COSMO” MURPHY / FANTASTIC TWINS

GOOD LORD



WELCOME TO ELECTRONIC SOUND

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'Doctor Who' has a big birthday coming up. The famous British sci-fi television show was first broadcast 60 years ago, on 23 November 1963, the day after JFK was shot, and there aren't many TV pop culture experiences with that kind of longevity or clout. It's remarkable that the telly thrills the BBC delivered directly into the frontal lobes of millions of children in the 1960s, courtesy of the adventures of a whimsical Time Lord and his young pals, are still being beamed into our living rooms six decades and 15 Doctors later.

But however good the various 21st century regenerations of 'Doctor Who' have been, they are no match for those electrifying, exhilarating and truly special early episodes. Even if they were in black and white. And a major part of the reason for that is the music and sound effects provided by the mighty BBC Radiophonic Workshop.

As well as giving the show a unique sonic signature, the Radiophonic Workshop's sound design was also responsible for rewiring the minds of the electronic musicians that jump-started the UK synth explosion of the late 1970s and early 1980s. We've said it before and we'll most likely say it again, but without this group of mavericks beavering away in the BBC's Maida Vale Studios, creating countless hours of electronic sound for the nation's entertainment, the music that we all love might not have blossomed in the way it did.

We have assembled a stellar cast of Radiophonic folk for our cover story, with Brian Hodgson, Dick Mills, Paddy Kingsland, Roger Limb, Peter Howell and Mark Ayres recalling those halycon days at Maida Vale, telling our man Bob Fischer tales about their sterling work for BBC TV and radio programmes right up to the sad demise of the legendary sound unit in 1996. We have three of Brian Hodgson's 'Doctor Who' pieces on the A-side of the seven-inch we're bundling with the magazine, by the way, including the chilling 'Dalek City Corridor' and the throbbing 'Dalek Control Room'. Listen out for a snatch of the TARDIS on the third track as well.

The flip side of the seven-inch is an extract from 'Inventions For Radio', a collaboration between Radiophonic Workshop dynamo Delia Derbyshire and playwright Barry Bermange. We've talked to David Butler from the Delia Derbyshire Archive about this pioneering sound collage elsewhere in the magazine, while our other interviews include Gazelle Twin (one person), Fantastic Twins (also one person) and Vanishing Twin (three people, although we have only spoken to one of them). We'd like to claim this was clever editorial planning, but it's actually just a slightly weird coincidence.

To prove that we're not obsessed with the twin thing, we have features on Maria Uzor, Jlin, James Holden, Colleen "Cosmo" Murphy and Sextile this month too. Mind you, on the subject of slight weirdness, Sextile have named their latest album after the editor of Electronic Sound. Goodness gracious.

Electronically yours,
Mark and Velimir

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‘PLANTASIA’

Green-Wood Cemetery, New York

14 SEPTEMBER 2023

PICTURE: ESTER SEGRETTO
WORDS: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

An evening of electronic music held in a cemetery might seem like a strange partnership. But it all makes perfect sense when tonight’s tribute is dedicated to Mort Garson. The Canadian composer’s career was a genuine whirlwind with no fixed line of travel. From training at New York’s Juilliard School, to scoring a Billboard Number One and working with the likes of Cliff Richard and Bill Withers.

Garson caught the electronic bug in 1967 after a chance meeting with Bob Moog. Later that same year, he composed ‘The Zodiac: Cosmic Sounds’, an album of early Moog experiments performed by Paul Beaver. Then came ‘The Wozard Of Iz: An Electronic Odyssey’, his hippieish, psychedelic synth parody of the classic novel. But arguably, Garson’s career-defining commission arrived in 1969, when CBS News asked him to write a six-minute piece of incidental synthesiser music to soundtrack their broadcast of the Apollo 11 moon landing.

Yet, the reason for tonight’s special event at Green-Wood cemetery in Brooklyn concerns a considerably less monumental chapter from Garson’s epic career – his ‘Mother Earth’s Plantasia’ album, from 1976. Sounding like a ‘Switched-On Bach’ for botanists, Garson produced this suite of Moog compositions for a Los Angeles plant shop (Mother Earth), supposedly to help their customers’ plants grow better. Startlingly, its otherworldly synth solos, swirly with carnivalesque whimsy, seem to anticipate where video game music would go decades later.

‘Plantasia’ fell into obscurity soon after its release, only to be rediscovered by record collectors in the late 2010s. This led to it being reissued in 2019 by Brooklyn label Sacred Bones – curators of tonight’s event along with NY cultural centre Pioneer Works. Several performers have been invited to “reimagine” tracks from the album, and with each artist stationed at one of three stages around the cemetery’s shimmering lake, the evening begins with North Americans’ dreamy guitar ambience, conjuring up images of vast landscapes and Midwestern plains.

The music then drifts into Alex Zhang Hungtai’s cold and sparse saxophone-led electronics, which linger and haunt the next set – Flying Lotus-style jazzy beatscapes from Afrofuturist duo DAOUI, igniting the cemetery with mystical energy. It’s a stark contrast to the heavy sounds of ex-Coil man Drew McDowall who follows, his confrontational drone bringing the night into its darkest and deepest moment.

Garson died in 2008, aged 83, with many of his groundbreaking electronic albums gathering dust. But if tonight’s event has shown anything, it’s that the sheer uniqueness of his musical legacy has brought inspiration to a new generation.

And who better to drive the point home than the orange-robed new age icon Laraaji with the closing set. Over meditative zither soundscapes, he chants nonsensically, finishing each burst with a simple and humorously self-aware, “You know what I’m talkin’ ‘bout”. You can’t not chuckle, and in channelling such eccentric lightness, he almost captures the absolute essence of what Garson’s own playful spirit was all about.

To hear more of Mort Garson’s music, visit sacredbones.com

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Brian Hodgson & The BBC Radiophonic Workshop
‘Dalek City Corridor’ / ‘Dalek Control Room’ / ‘Explosion, TARDIS Stops’

Delia Derbyshire & Barry Bermange
‘Inventions For Radio – The Dreams (Excerpt)’

Silver vinyl seven-inch

We’re celebrating the 60th anniversary of ‘Doctor Who’ with this month’s exclusive seven-inch, which features three Radiophonic Workshop pieces from the 1963 serial ‘The Daleks’, together with an extract from Delia Derbyshire’s pioneering ‘Inventions For Radio’ sound collage

SIDE A

Brian Hodgson was still a fresh recruit to the Radiophonic Workshop when he was tasked with producing the otherworldly “Special Sound” for ‘Doctor Who’. Sixty years on, we have three superb examples of Hodgson’s work on the A-side of this month’s seven-inch, all of them created for ‘The Daleks’, a seven-part serial broadcast in 1963. Fans of the television show will be especially familiar with ‘Dalek Control Room’.

“I thought that if the Daleks had a control room, then it should be sending out a pulse,” says Hodgson. “Like a heartbeat, transmitting to the Daleks themselves. It’s amazing they’re still using it on the show.”

Hodgson believes the imaginative concepts he developed for the ‘Doctor Who’ project had their roots in his early career in repertory theatre, pointing out that actors frequently invent backstories. He approached the recording of these gloriously strange noises in typically inventive fashion.

“It all depended on what I had available to me,” he explains. “And in 1963, that really was fuck all! Apart from wave oscillators and the carcass of an old Sunday School piano.”

The manipulated strings of that piano famously became the sound of the TARDIS, which appears here on ‘Explosion, TARDIS Stops’, while the record opens with the sinister throb of ‘Dalek City Corridor’. Each of Hodgson’s three ‘Doctor Who’ pieces illustrates how he introduced millions of British children to the exciting world of experimental sound.

“That’s what the Radiophonic Workshop was all about,” he says proudly. “It reprogrammed the hearing of a whole generation.”

SIDE B

The flip side of the record is an extract from the first instalment of ‘Inventions For Radio’, a collaboration between Radiophonic Workshop stalwart Delia Derbyshire and playwright Barry Bermange. It was originally broadcast on the BBC’s Third Programme in 1964 and 1965.

Derbyshire and Bermange assembled recordings of people from different social backgrounds talking about a wide range of subjects – from ageing to the existence of God – into four fascinating sound collages of speech and radiophonic music. In this excerpt, the participants are enthusiastically describing the colours of their dreams.

“What I think is quietly subversive about ‘The Dreams’ is the suggestion that we’re all sharing the same giant collective dream,” says Dr David Butler, curator of the Delia Derbyshire Archive. “We all have similar anxieties and desires – and they run across any divisions.”

Butler, who is Senior Lecturer in Drama and Film Studies at the University of Manchester, has written extensive liner notes for the forthcoming boxset release of ‘Inventions For Radio’. He’s keen to praise the non-literal nature of Derbyshire’s musical contribution.

“Delia leaves space for the imagination of the listener,” says Butler. “She isn’t chasing the interviewees all the time or even really following what they are saying. She allows us to bring in our own experiences and connections, so we’re involved in the process and we’re thinking about our own dreams. I think we’re hearing the origins of ambient music here.”

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STANDARD-BEARER

Meet the console of your dreams

Are you an audiophile? Do you have a spare $9,000 knocking about? If you answer in the affirmative to both of these questions, perhaps you should consider splashing out on The Standard (which thankfully is anything but standard, given that eye-watering price tag).

Made by stateside furniture makers Wrensilva, it resembles a pimped-out version of the sort of wood-finished music cabinet you might have seen in your parents' lounge in the 1970s. But there's nothing old-fashioned about this. The Standard features six listening modes, a premium turntable and Sonos compatibility, along with storage space for up to 135 albums. If it sounds half as good as it looks, your ears will be in for an absolute treat. **wrensilva.com**

PULSE

FERAL FIVE

Two electronicists search for the truth

WHO?

Feral Five are electronic pop duo Kat Five (Katharina Tyldesley – vocals, guitar, percussion) and Drew Five (Andy Smith – synths, guitar, beats). They're based in the south-east of England, and occasionally expand to being a trio when Kat is accompanied by an AI version of herself.

WHY FERAL FIVE?

Taking cues from electronica's long-standing obsession with new technology, Feral Five's music has always operated with an eye to evolution and transformation. They've used 3D printers both as sound sources and as tools to develop artworks and embraced the generative potential of algorithms and coding in their live sets. This approach to technological developments led to the patronage of another futurist, one Martyn Ware, who invited the duo to perform at his 'Everything You Can Imagine Is Real' event for the National Portrait Gallery's 'Picasso Portraits' exhibition in 2017.

TELL US MORE...

Feral Five released their debut album, 'Truth Is The New Gold', in February this year. While the album continues their intense explorations of big changes in our world, its 11 songs take a more cautious, sideways view. Framing the album's defiant title track are concerns about misinformation, while on 'Roll It With Me', Kat's edgy vocal carries a disdain for social media doomscrolling. 'Silver Sky' delves into the impact of light pollution on birds, and 'Skin In The Game' acts like a punky call to arms against passive attitudes. Hyper-aware, worldly-wise and appropriately cynical, 'Truth Is The New Gold' is a vivid document of everyday life in 2023, a future time capsule that will be used to make sense of how everything went wrong, all framed by clever synth work and enveloping vocals.

MAT SMITH

'Truth Is The New Gold' is out now on Reckless Yes

BANGING ON

More random musings from **Fat Roland**. On his mind this month (as far as we can tell) is **Cabaret**

A 'Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret' sounds exhausting and more than a little impractical. This was, of course, the title of Soft Cell's debut album, which was released back in 1066AD, or at least a very long time ago.

Soft Cell were edgy, like a, erm, dodecahedron or something else with lots of edges. They put the "oral" into "morality". They had leather jackets and sometimes moustaches, which definitely made them naughty. They probably had leather chaps too – by which I mean the suggestive clothing and not some random dudes made from cowhide.

Life was free and wonderful back then – unlike life today, which is full of disappointment and desolation, where all we have left are mortgages and psoriasis and The 1975. That said, a non-stop erotic cabaret would be too much for me.

The cabaret element is fun. Everyone loves a sing-song… and I don't mind the erotic bit. You should see what I can do with 17 metres of clingfilm and a sink plunger. It's the non-stop element I worry about. It would be great at first, but literally going on forever? All that dancing? All that writhing? Until the end of time?! The chafing would be terrible. No wonder their love got so tainted.

Electronic pop has had flashes of lipstick and eyeliner, none more so than with the energetic bleeps of Erasure. I'm still scandalised that they only had one solitary chart-topping single, but that's for another column. There was also Brian Eno, who added a touch of feathery glam to Roxy Music, looking like a startled ostrich that had just coughed up a synthesiser.

Since then, electronic music has been unrelentingly miserable, like tax returns and rickets and, er, The 1975. Our pop stars have been reduced to dour duos being ironic in rain-soaked streets. Stoned synth-twiddlers in dimly lit student clubs. A gay cowboy straddling a glittery horse. Wait. That last one is Lil Nas X, the most cabaret human ever to exist. Maybe there is hope after all.

Introduce a cabaret spirit into your dreary life. Start by watching the 1972 film 'Cabaret', in which Liza Minelli plays a working-class rapper who finds his voice in freestyle rap battles on the tough streets of Detroit. Hmmm, I might be getting my films mixed up…

There are other ways to cabaretise your world. Only buy vinyl records if they're neon pink. Only wear accessories made from leather, and yes I'm including contact lenses. Do random jazz hands, maybe while strimming your lawn or performing open-heart surgery. Or, next time you're in a queue at the post office, start a dance routine like out of that film where everyone does the full monty. Can't remember the title. I bet Marc Almond would remember, the naughty little dodecahedron-shaped sausage.

IBID YOU FAREWELL

iPod collects record fee at auction

First released in 2001, the iPod remains one of the most iconic pieces of technology produced this side of the millennium. In 2007 it became known as the iPod Classic, and was finally discontinued in 2014, much to the disappointment of music fans around the world. Since then, prices have soared as stocks of functioning devices dwindle, and last month an investor on Rally, the online collectibles auction website, coughed up a record $29,000 for an unopened first-gen iPod. That's a whopping £22,770 and 72 times the original market price. If anyone still has one knocking around somewhere in their attic, we suggest you send it into the Electronic Sound offices for urgent consultation. **rallyrd.com**

SIMPLE PLEASURES

Catch memoir of star Scottish bassist

Derek Forbes is best-known as Simple Minds' former bassist, but he originally started his musical career as lead guitarist in the Scottish punk outfit Subs, whose first single, 'Gimme Your Heart', was released by Stiff Records. It's one of the earlier musical experiences of Forbes' life, as described in his new autobiography 'A Very Simple Mind', but he would go on to have a glittering career, recording with the likes of David Bowie, Iggy Pop and Pink Floyd's Dave Gilmour. And we've not even started on his awards collection. It's a good read, and next month you can pick up a signed edition for £22. **foxlanebooks.co.uk**

Bill Laswell & Pete Namlook

Outland

6CD Boxset. Oct 2023

A collaborative endeavour by visionary US bassist-producer Bill Laswell and late musician Pete Namlook that pushed the boundaries of dark ambient and electronic music. A lavish matte-finish boxset containing 6CDs in individually-designed sleeves and exclusive card, with an essay about "Outland" written by Laswell, 2023

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COLOURS OF THE COSMOS

Soundscape machine gets new paint job

First released in 2021, the Cosmos was typical of the creative and unconventional units made by Warsaw company Soma Laboratory. Taking inspiration from Brian Eno and Robert Fripp's "Frippertronics" experiments in generating constant "recombinations" of source audio, it works by constantly shifting timing relationships among delay lines via an asynchronous LFO and modulation, making what the company call "a drifting memory station". The Cosmos has now been given the new colour treatment, with Soma unveiling orange, pink, blue, green and white finishes. If you've been in the market for something that both looks and sounds lavishly experimental, now is probably the time to withdraw that £569. **somasynths.com**

PULSE

L'AVENIR

Cold synth carnage from Baltimore

WHO?

L'Avenir is the alias of Jason Sloan, a professor, video artist, composer and veteran electronicist who lives in Baltimore, Maryland. Sloan says that the music he makes primarily falls under the umbrella of "cold synth". But it touches numerous genres, with stylish, ethereal electronics and intense clap-centric beats acting as an unwavering foundation for deep, reverb-soaked vocals and fiercely poetic lyrics.

WHY L'AVENIR?

Although the name L'Avenir literally translates from French as "the future", a single encounter with elegiac tracks like 'Shine So Bright (In Silver)', 'The Pageantry Of Loneliness' and 'Evanesce' will tell you that Sloan takes a good deal of inspiration from the past. Not only does he hold up artists like Fad Gadget, Depeche Mode and DAF as his primary influences, he also creates every note of L'Avenir's music using analogue equipment. But this is not to say that L'Avenir's only achievement is successfully mimicking the past. It's more that he's found himself a big old vintage lens and is using it to look directly at that flaming ball of future in the sky, making music that remains evocative of those acts which have clearly inspired him, but which also offers a glimpse of something darker, something more mysterious… something unknown.

TELL US MORE...

Earlier this year, L'Avenir released a split album with fellow Baltimorean and post-punk/synthpop devotee Kiss Of The Whip (Tristan Victor). And now Sloan is writing a full-length follow-up to 2021's 'Shadow & Reflection'. The new record should be finished soon and is due for release sometime in late winter. A perfect album for those long, dark nights, one suspects.

IMOGEN BEBB

L'Avenir and Kiss Of The Whip's 'Split' is out now via Bandcamp

PULSE

NORTHLING

Watch out for Lancaster power group

WHO?

Lancashire sextet Northling are made up of vocalist and keys player Joe Spencer, guitarist and trumpeter Mike Mackenzie, drummer John Dopping, bassist Ally Brown, vocalist Charlotte Rumley and synthesist George Slack. Quite a spread. And it shows in their music, with compositions whittled down democratically – even with regard to lyrics, impressively. "There's this progressive nature to a lot of the music we write," says Spencer. "It never really looks back – it's always moving forward and ending in a different place to where it began."

WHY NORTHLING?

Northling's sound may tug on the post-classical stylings of Hidden Orchestra and Hannah Peel with not a little emotional heft, but they're offset by a lush blend of electronica, jazz and pop that you're more likely to link to acts like Bristol's Ishmael Ensemble or The Cinematic Orchestra. The band draw inspiration from the ever-changing landscapes of Lancashire, encompassing its coastlines, lakes and fells, where shifting seasons can unfold within a single hour. It makes perfect sense. Northling's music is like hearing morphing waves of sound, transitioning from melancholic to euphoric with real skill.

TELL US MORE...

Their new EP, 'Hallowed Ground', is the product of a series of live writing sessions conducted in Northling's studio. It sees the band leaning into more ambitious, cinematic soundscapes. The closing track, 'Bones', is a haunting, sampled meditation on the words, "It's very beautiful", which dovetails magnificently with vocal harmonies and heavily compressed piano, all underpinned by some very deft drum work from John Dopping. As Charlotte Rumley aptly sings on 'Wild', "Into the wild we go…".

WILLIAM STOKES

'Hallowed Ground' is out now on Reflections

NEEDS MUST

Freewheeling through time and space, **Kris Needs** continues his adventures in sound. This month: **Richard Sen**

My 45 years covering electronic music for assorted publications has led to meeting and interviewing countless DJ-producers, including a select few who became instant kindred spirits in obsessive vinyl junkie behaviour.

These include Richard Sen, the former graffiti artist and DJ on London's early acid house scene who I met when he designed the cover of 'Smokebelch' for Sabres Of Paradise 30 years ago. Richard's deep knowledge of old skool hip hop, early Chicago house and obscure UK techno was reflected in his Bronx Dogs creations, like 1998's 'Tribute To Jazzy Jay', and 2012's set 'This Ain't Chicago: The Underground Sound Of UK House & Acid 1987-1991'.

Veterans of trawling NYC record bins, we could chat fevered trainspotting minutiae for hours and even collaborated on a track based on IRT's 'Watch The Closing Doors'.

Like its predecessor, Richard's sparkling new anthology, 'Dream The Dream: UK Techno, House And Breakbeat 1990-1994', swings the focus from classic chestnuts to lesser-known nuggets released in that tumultuous period in electronic music. Many of these have often been overlooked until now.

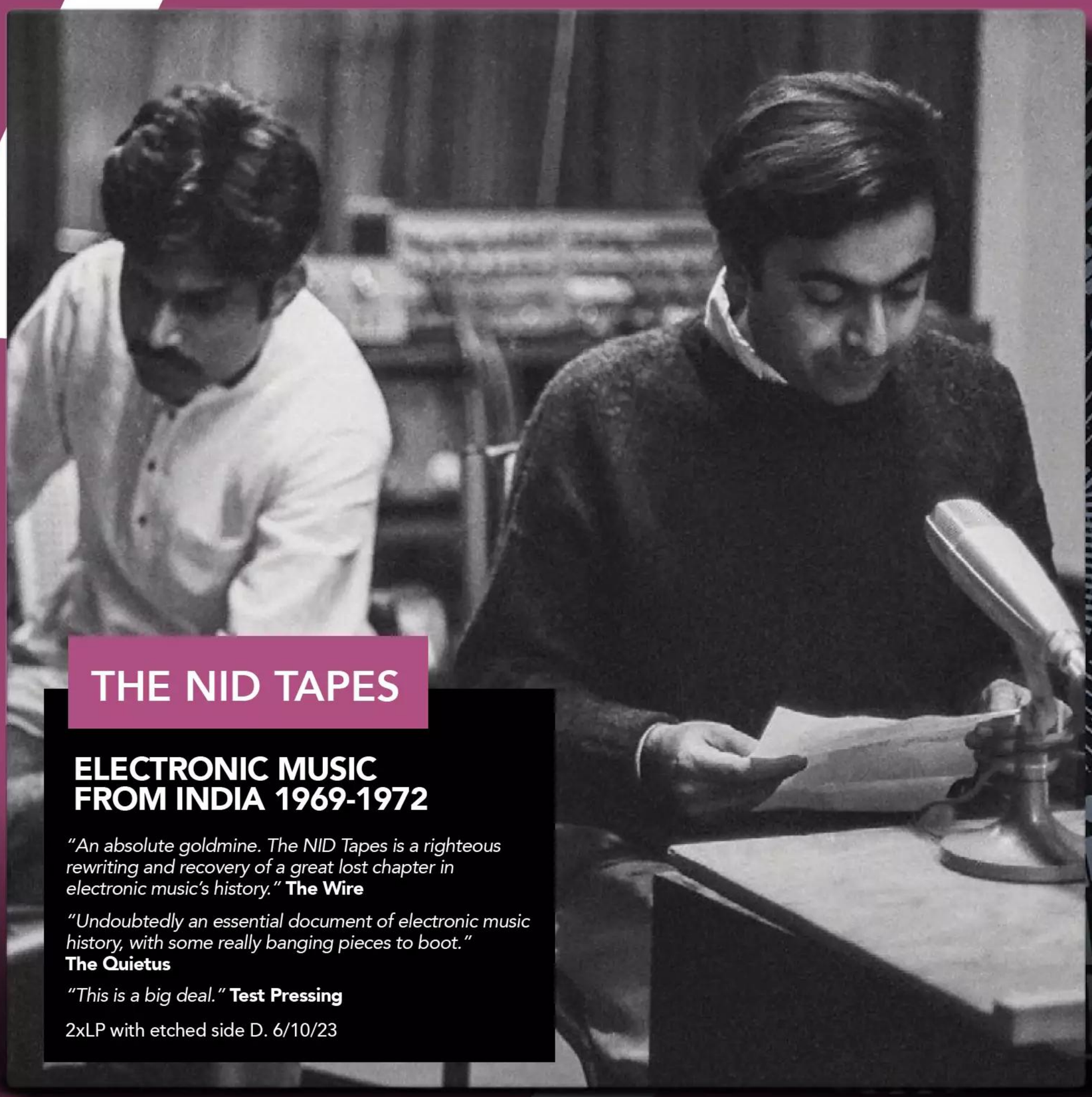
During this period, I was writing my original Needs Must column for Echoes and recall reviewing much of its menu, including Mind Over Rhythm's super sexy 'Kubital Footstorm', Bandulu's ambient 'Amaranth', As One's 'Isatai' and UVX's 'Elevator (Trancefloor Transporter)'. These were compellingly holding their own against the incoming floods of stonking US-Euro vinyl (a pleasant shock to find 'Bombers Over Baghdad' by my late Aylesbury mate and Bucks Fizz songwriter Warren Harry – here trading as Biff'Um Baff'Um Boys – with the unashamedly opportunistic track!)

"The selections for this compilation are my own personal favourites from that era," explains Richard. "Back then, electronic dance music was young, innocent and fun – it hadn't been analysed, theorised and fragmented into the multi-genre industry it is today.

"What you hear on this compilation reflects what I was playing at that time… joining the dots between ambient, techno, tribal house, breakbeat and early trance productions from the UK. Much of the house and techno from the USA, Belgium, Germany and Holland has been well-documented, but some of the more obscure British productions are lesser-known and need to be showcased."

Absolutely agreed, and there's no finer man for the job. Talking about electronic pioneers, the last two episodes of my 'Into The Cosmic Hutch' podcast with Nina Walsh on YouTube boast previously unseen interviews with Suicide and Andrew Weatherall joining Nina's music and cult-stoking Sweep spots.

Watch the skies.



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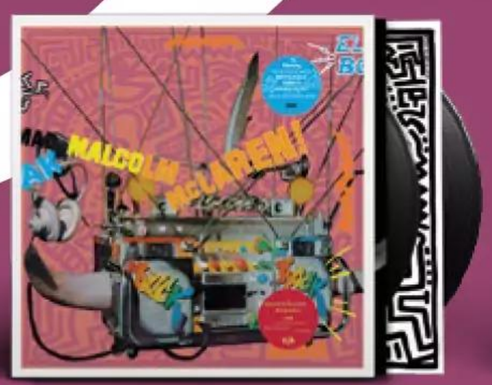

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UNDER THE INFLUENCE

With the release of 'Balearic Breakfast: Volume 2', an album informed by her eclectic radio shows on Worldwide FM, **Colleen "Cosmo" Murphy** shares her key influences

INTERVIEW: JEREMY ALLEN

DECKS APPEAL

"When I was 12, my dad brought me a hand-me-down GE Trimline record player, which was made in the 1960s. His friend was having a clear-out and had this record player with the speakers that fold out. When I was growing up, the only way you could hear music was if you owned it or you heard it on the radio.

"I used to have to listen to music on the hi-fi in the living room where my mom and dad were. But once I was able to control my own listening with a turntable in my room, that's really the start of my huge passion for albums. With no one bothering me, I'd listen to an album from beginning to end, and my uncle lived down the street so I was able to raid his record collection. The first one that I became obsessed with was 'Days Of Future Passed' by The Moody Blues."

ON MY RADIO

"Growing up outside Boston, we had great radio, which most of America didn't have. Boston has the most universities out of any city in the country, so we had all these college stations. By the time I was in high school, my favourite commercial station was WBCN – the local album-oriented rock station.

"The programme director was called Oedipus, and he had this terrific radio show called 'Nocturnal Emissions' on Sunday nights. He would play records I'd never heard before that weren't classic rock – Joy Division, New Order, The Smiths, and all this new wave and off-the-wall music way outside of the Top 40 and classic rock canon. The music inspired my record collecting, and I would go into Boston to try to buy some of the records that I heard him play, which could be anything from 'Nuggets' compilations to Rahsaan Roland Kirk. The clerk behind the counter would be wondering what this 15-year-old white girl was doing buying Roland Kirk records.

"I don't know how Oedipus got the name, but that's what he called himself. And then, 'Nocturnal Emissions'? You can't make this stuff up."

LOFTY IDEAS

"I first started going to The Loft when David Mancuso reopened it on East 3rd Street in 1991 or 1992. It changed my life in terms of becoming a dance music DJ. I'd been playing different kinds of music up to that point. I heard dance music that really resonated with me, and it also turned me on to audiophile sound. Even though I was a tape editor and had studied sound at New York University, I didn't know much about speakers and amplifiers, preamplifiers and moving coil cartridges. That was all new to me, and David taught me that.

"He also recommended a book called 'The Life Energy In Music' by John Diamond. And although both David and I didn't agree with everything Diamond had to say – because he was only into classical music and dismissed pop and rock – he said that music should be raising your vibrational energy.

PHOTO: EILON PAZ

"This is something I really feel, and it doesn't mean that all music has to be happy and positive. Sometimes you need music to help you cry, sometimes you need it to express your anger. But it's still tapping into your soul, as opposed to bland music that just brings down your energy levels. Music is for healing, and music that you identify with because it's painful is just as much a healing experience."

NORMAN CONQUEST

"I grew up listening to Motown, which was the sound of young America in the 1960s. It was quite extraordinary, but it was also locked into a certain sound of optimistic pop or beautiful ballads, or whatever. And [producer/Motown arranger] Norman Whitfield just bucked the trend, combining two of my favourite forms of music – soul and psychedelic rock.

"He could see in the late 1960s that there was a massive cultural shift in America – students were protesting against the war, people were taking acid, there's the hippie movement, the civil rights movement, and there's a lot of positive ideological action about moving forward and progressing. And he taps into this in a musical sense, and realises that we need to reach beyond just thinking about the Top 40 audience.

"So he'd be listening to Hendrix and Sly Stone and trying to incorporate that into his own productions and songwriting and arrangements with The Undisputed Truth, Rare Earth, The Temptations and later, Rose Royce. It's rock fused with soul, funk and gospel – all my favourite things wrapped up with great songwriting, lyrics, performers, musicians and singers. It blows my mind."

GOOD WOOD

"I've lived in east London for over two decades. Epping Forest has always been on my doorstep, but I'd only been two or three times before the pandemic. Suddenly, I found myself going there all the time, and I know it like the back of my hand now. I grew up in a small town where you'd just pack a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and go to the woods for the day, and as you get older, you tap into those childhood experiences. I found that I really still needed nature in my life.

"I love London for its diversity, arts and culture, and we have more green space than any other major city in the world. I've meditated in the forest and hiked the entire thing from top to bottom. I just find it's a great place for me to reset. I never wear headphones, and I don't listen to music when I'm walking there. I just listen to the trees and the birds, and completely tap into another world."

'Balearic Breakfast: Volume 2' is out now on Heavenly

EAR YE EAR YE

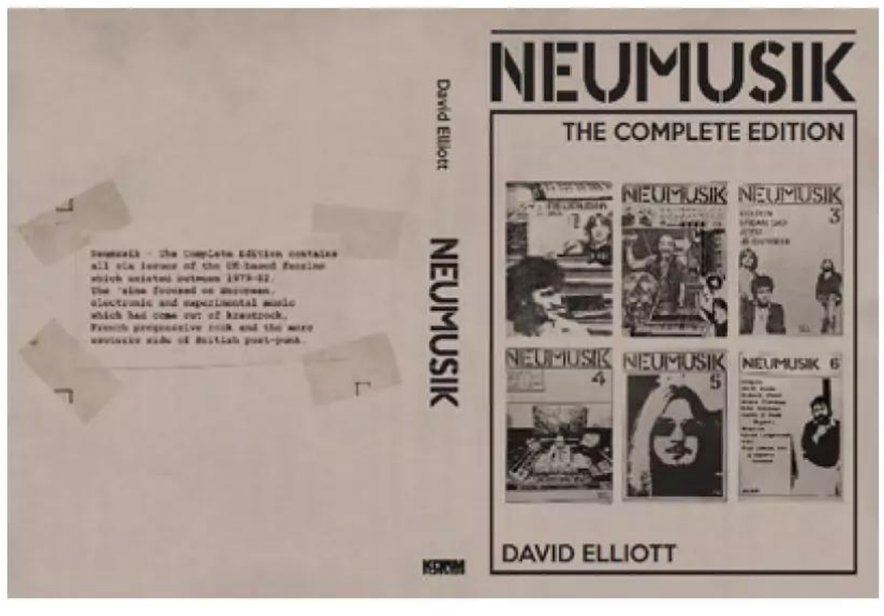
Buds to make you purr

South Korea's Astell & Kern have earned a good reputation for their high-end audio gubbins, and that's a trend that looks set to continue with their fancy new AK UW100MKII wireless earphones. Looking a bit like a pair of Dungeons & Dragons dice, they boast an embedded 32-bit DAC and a full-range balanced armature driver, along with a redesigned acoustic chamber. Battery-wise, they can manage a total of 9.5 hours of playback time on one charge, but the charging case brings that up to 29. The real clincher, though, is that you can connect with multiple devices at one time, so you can switch easily between listening to music and taking a call. For £269, you'd be silly not to. It's Astell & Kern, for goodness sake. **astellnkern.com**

DEDICATED LOVE

Neumusik fanzine comes of age

From 1979 to 1982, David Elliott edited the fanzine Neumusik while "studying" at university. He published six issues during that time, each pushing between 60 and 80 pages, and now Elliott is releasing a compendium of his work. Centering on "krautrock, French progressive rock and the more esoteric side of British post-punk", the 425-page book features interviews with Chris Carter, Conrad Schnitzler, Richard Pinhas, and Popul Vuh's Florian Fricke, as well as some great original backstage photographs. Fanzines don't get much better than this. Get your copy now for €18.50. **kormplastics.nl/neumusik.html**



WHIP-ROUND

Throw your cash at these Devo figurines

There is something incredibly, and almost *specifically*, Devo about the existence of these Mark Mothersbaugh 'Whip It' action figures, which you can order for $20 from design house Super7. Looking like those 1980s 'Star Wars' figurines, complete with colourful blister packaging, the Akron outfit's frontman is depicted here alongside a bonus bowl of whipped cream, wearing a red energy dome hat and grasping a whip, natch. Super7 have pedigree for this sort of thing, and you might spy another one of Bob Casale, clad in a yellow boiler suit and holding an electric guitar. Money well-spent. **super7.com**

SPACE IS THE PLACE

NASA lands on your TV

We've lost count of the number of streaming services available now, but this new one you should certainly be taking notice of. NASA – yes, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration – are starting their own free streaming service called NASA Plus, allowing folks to watch the agency's own launches, exclusive documentaries and more. Though there's no release date yet, NASA says the service will be available on smart TVs and boxes, and will be integrated into an upgraded NASA app in both the Android and iOS stores. It might be one small step for the agency, but it's one giant leap for mankind. **nasa.gov**

WITH NEW FOREWORD BY DAVID AND STEPHEN DEWAELE

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DISCO POGO

James Holden, DJ, producer and Border Community boss, describes the making of '**Bania**', a modular synth mashup with traditional Moroccan singers that changed the course of his life

INTERVIEW: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

"The email said, 'Do you want to do a residency in Marrakesh with some Gnawa musicians?'. It was the worst possible time because I had just finished 'The Inheritors' album. I was already replying with a polite 'no' when my partner Gemma told me to think about it.

"At the time, I was a compulsive music downloader and had tons of tapes from Morocco. It hadn't really clicked when I first read the email, but they'd mentioned Maalem Mahmoud Guinia, and I realised I actually had some of his music. I was also starting to see 'The Inheritors' more and more as a kind of folk-electronic crossover, and was thinking of dance music as folk music. In the end I said, 'Fuck it!', and turned my schedule upside down.

"I began looking at Gnawa rhythms to try to work them out. I made a Max MSP patch that was like a drum machine that did the krakeb – that really distinctive rhythm. I was very pleased with this patch and felt it had real Gnawa energy to it. So I thought I'd see what happened when I got there.

"On the first day, after all the formal hellos with no one speaking the same language, the people organising the residency trying to smooth things over, and the Boiler Room guys trying to film everything – we finally sat down and started playing. There was this feeling of expectation in the room, and I was captivated when Maalem Mahmoud Guinia and his band started playing. Everyone in the band – half of them were his sons – was a real musician and they sang from their hearts.

"My drum machine was in time for about one bar. Gnawa music is actually supposed to change tempo – that's what sucks you into the hypnotic state and is part of what makes it so powerful – but I hadn't realised it until then. I was not coping. I tried switching to manual triggers and had one of the band members doing the triggers for me on a kind of drum pad. Mahmoud was encouraging me, like an old man saying, 'Come on son, you can do it!', though without even speaking the same language. I felt so ashamed.

"That night I stayed up until 6am. I had my modular case in bed with me and I sat there with some hash and tea and completely repatched it. I said to myself, 'None of that is going to work. I have to play melodies, and I have to find a way to play melodies that aren't plain, that fit and feel worthwhile'.

"I came up with a patch that used three quantizers and a Make Noise Pressure Points module – a voltage memory thing. I had a ribbon controller as well, and with those I could switch between different chords or inversions of chords… move it around. The pressure was on a filter, and it was like three oscillators. It felt like a genuine instrument.

"The next day I was determined to be less separated by language, and so I tried speaking French and Mahmoud spoke a bit of English. I asked if they wanted to go for a spliff before we started, and they were like, 'Thank God!'. They'd all been hired to do this residency and they had to be on their best behaviour, but suddenly everybody gets their pouches out and we go outside

PHOTO: CAMILLE BLAKE

to set up. The hotel was a nice villa with a pool and I remember birds were singing in the distance.

"We couldn't agree on which song to play. Then Mahmoud was like, 'Try this one', and riffed it out. I found the notes – I had a Casio keyboard there to work out the notes he was playing, and I put them into my quantizers. I don't even know what they were – I've tried to recreate it so many times. In the end, I crossed my fingers and we started recording.

"It felt good, and I could see Mahmoud thinking, 'Ah, he's doing it'. We made eye contact and started building up together. I was running on pure adrenaline, trying to relax into it while also thinking, 'Don't fuck it up, James!'.

"As we built it up, Mahmoud nodded to his band to stop and they suddenly cut the krakeb. I realised he was orchestrating what I saw as the trance breakdown – the rhythm stopped, while he built the energy up to the point where the drums come back in again. That was all his idea. I was just following him, wondering where he was taking it.

"The rush when he nodded to his band, and they all piled in with 12 metal castanets! I've had great times in the studio, but making 'Bania' is the best. Being a studio guy, the moment of musical invention occurs at some random point between me turning up and going home, or it may not happen at all. What felt special with Mahmoud was that it happened *exactly* when I needed it to, almost as if from God or something.

"When I got home, I felt quite a lot of pressure again not to fuck it up. I had a difficult relationship with mixing at that point in my career, and sometimes I would spend so long I'd just kill it. I ended up mixing it in a day using analogue equipment – an Alice 828 – so it was quite dirty-sounding.

"Rather than treating it like some anthropological world music recording, I treated it like a band, so the guembri – a three-stringed lute – went through a suboctave pedal and a Drawmer 1968 compressor running really hard, which I love. I was thinking a lot about how I didn't want to just be colonial and extractive.

"I think I had to put myself in this very embarrassing and stressful situation of trying to play above my skill level. I didn't realise it when I set off for that trip, but I'd never played live with another person, apart from in a high school band. It made me think a lot about how we structure music in the West, and that has fed into what I've done ever since. I've realised that if you want to play with people, you can't be a dictator, turning up like, 'Yeah, this is the MIDI time code, best get into it!'.

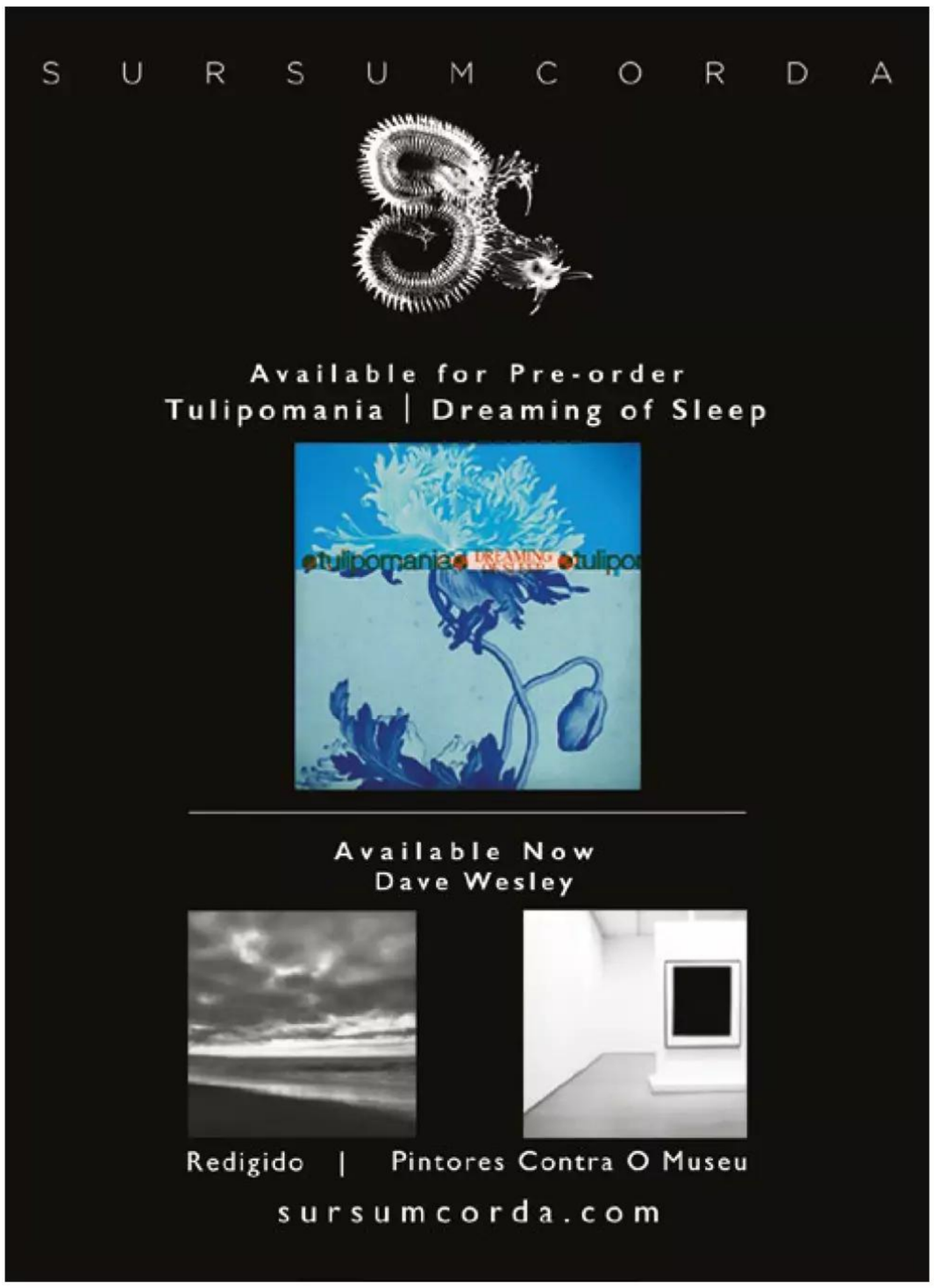
"That trip was the fork in the road. The year between 'The Inheritors' and the 'Bania' recording changed my life, really. I don't know where I'd be without it."

For more, visit jamesholden.bandcamp.com/track/bania

PILGRIMAGE SITE

Chems' album-cover landmark saved

Fans of The Chemical Brothers can breathe a sigh of relief, because the church of Our Lady Of Fatima in Harlow, Essex, has officially been granted Grade II* listing by the UK government. As featured on the cover of the duo's 1998 'Brothers Gonna Work It Out' album, the 500-capacity Gerard Goalen-designed building opened in 1960, replete with astonishing dalle de verre stained-glass windows covering an impressive 60 per cent of its wall space. Was The Chem Bros' use of its image a key factor in the decision to protect its "historic and architectural significance"? Truth be told, no, it wasn't. But we're grateful all the same, and you can visit to pay your respects. **olfstm.weebly.com**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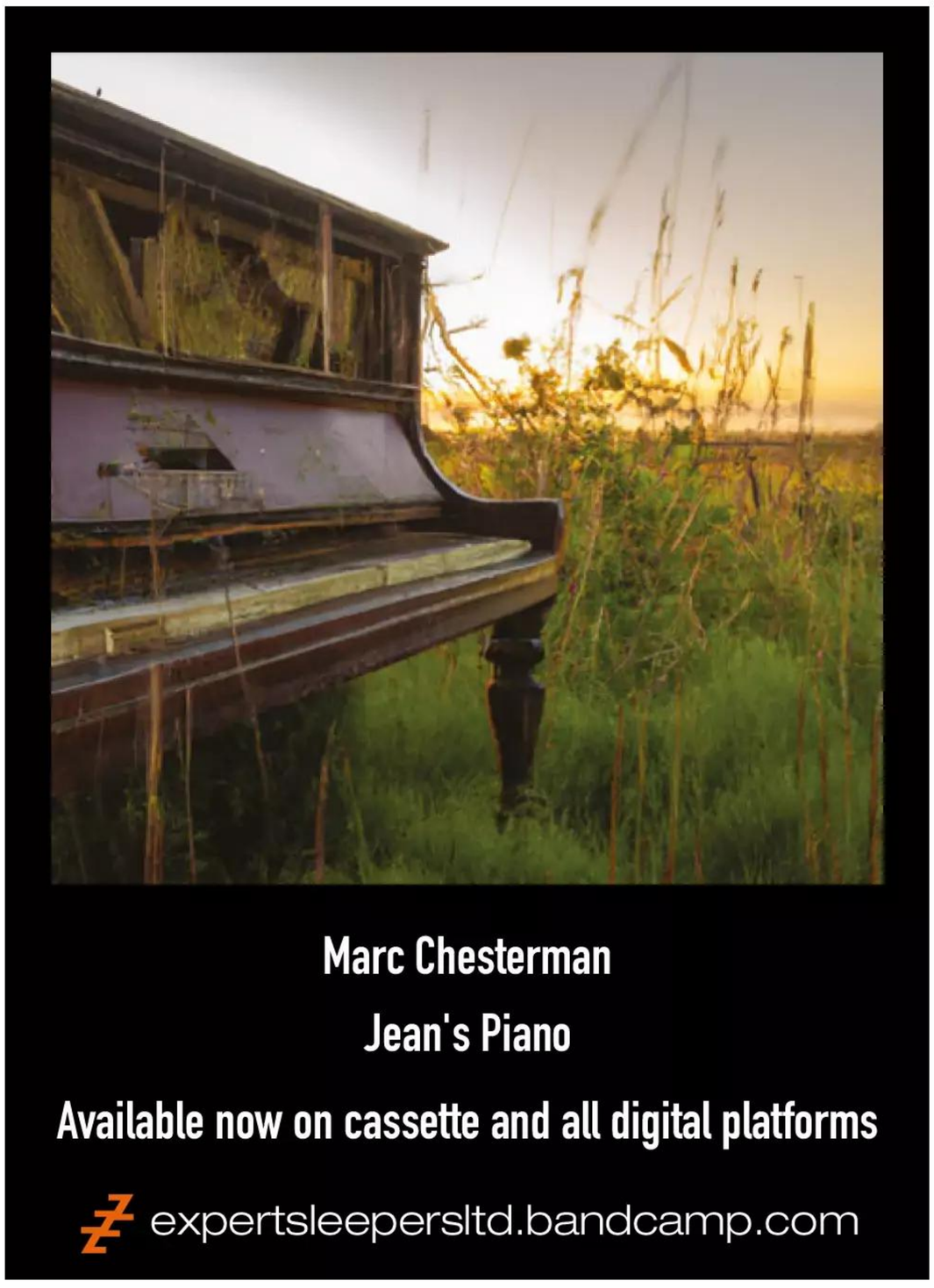
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PULSE

TR^NKS

Ex-indie stars turned electro thrillers

WHO?

A new electronic trio formed by Christian Davis, formerly of 1990s cult indie rockers Six By Seven and lauded shoegazers Spotlight Kid, TR^NKS weave the seismic spaciousness of Davis' former bands into early Warp techno beats and pastoral ambient sounds. Their new EP, 'Your Life / Your Lie', ups the ante from their first two as an anthemic slice of dancefloor psych, all jittery beats and kinetic energy.

WHY TR^NKS?

They emerged in October 2022 with 'EP 1', followed by the 'Invisible EP' in March this year, but it sounds like they have been at this forever. And even within that short period they have evolved. The debut EP positioned classic pop songwriting against M83-style electronic dreampop, New Order rhythms and early IDM, while 'Invisible' was a pastoral, ambient exploration of wintery landscapes with nods to Talk Talk and Boards Of Canada. Released last month, the title track from 'Your Life / Your Lie' leans on those nascent IDM vibes further, but delves deeper into introspection, exploring regret and self-reflection. That's a lot of ground covered in three releases. TR^NKS' music sits somewhere in between the rave, the after-party and stadium rock.

TELL US MORE...

While the foundation of the TR^NKS sound came from Davis' solo experiments in a "floating studio" inside a barge in north-west London – armed with a laptop, old Juno 60 and drum machines – the huge sound we hear now is completed by long-time friends and collaborators Dave Startin (of Nottingham post-punk/synth-rock duo I Am Lono) and Chris Moore (also from Spotlight Kid). TR^NKS might be made up of very established players, but arguably this is the best music they have ever released.

JAMES THORNHILL

'Your Life / Your Lie' is out now via Bandcamp

GAME-CHANGER

New hybrid turntable from Pioneer DJ

Pioneer DJ's PLX-CRSS12 doesn't exactly roll off the tongue, but it does enjoy the mantle of being the world's first turntable to bring analogue vinyl playback and tone-arm-free DVS (Digital Vinyl System) control together under one matte black panel. At its most basic level, Pioneer DJ promise it'll feel just like using the gold-standard PLX-1000, but there are also some clever design features here. These include a MAGVEL clamp to allow records to feel lighter or heavier without changing or adjusting slip mats, and adjustable turntable rotation torque via an onboard OLED screen. Even the platter's stopping speed has three settings. Smart stuff for £1,199. **pioneerdj.com**

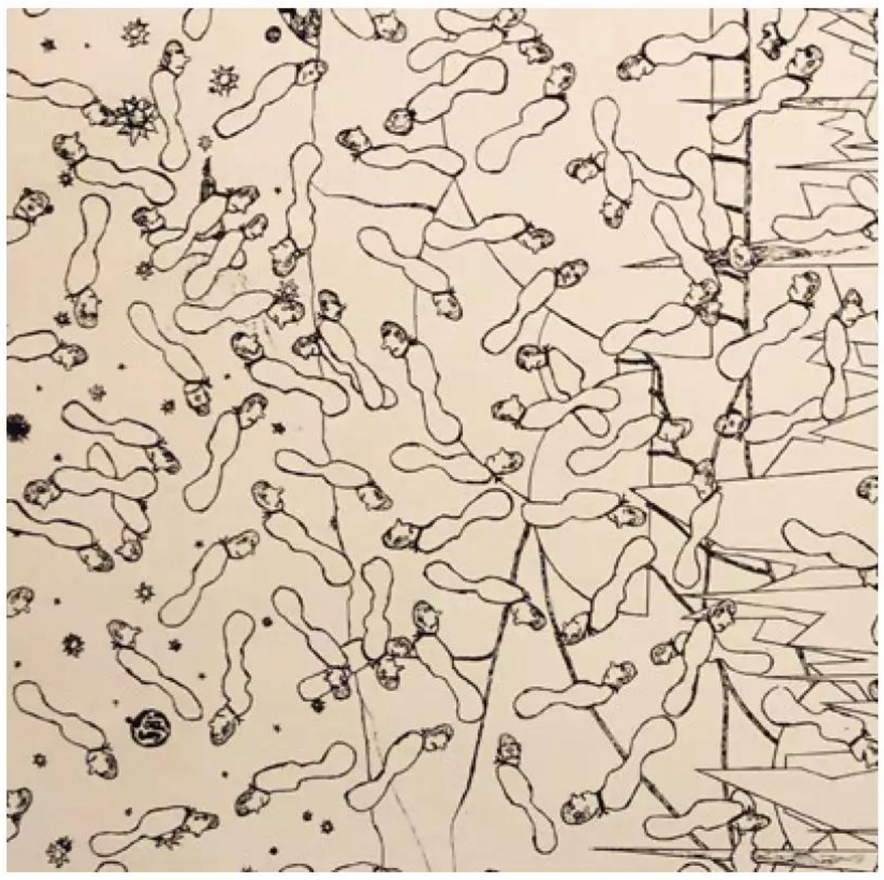
STRIKE A CHORDA

Multi-gestural electronic musical instrument

Nashville's Artiphon have unveiled the Chorda, which they're calling a new all-in-one instrument "designed for everyday life". Building on the design of the $149 Orba 2, the standalone instrument and MIDI controller resembles something like a synthetic guitar neck and can be played like a keyboard, a drum machine or even strummed like a guitar. And like the Orba, the Chorda supports a range of gestures, from tapping to tilting. If Artiphon's Kickstarter campaign is anything to go by (it grossed around $674,000), the Chorda looks set to be a shoo-in. Preorder one now for $249. **artiphon.com**

SCHOOL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Resident archivist **Jack Dangers** looks at an album by **Foreign World** that's stuffed with strange art inserts – and the music is even more peculiar



'Trying To Escape' by Foreign World was released in 1984. I just love this record. The artist, Robert Vigneault, has designed the whole package to be a kind of multisensory experience, before you even get to the record itself.

There are six inserts of these complex ink doodles, and one of them is a large poster. It probably took longer to do these than it did to make the music. They're so intricate, and very weird. The album cover opens on an unexpected side, with the artwork on the front not the same way round as it is on the back, so it forces you to keep turning the sleeve around. You don't know which way is up – which is the whole point, I think.

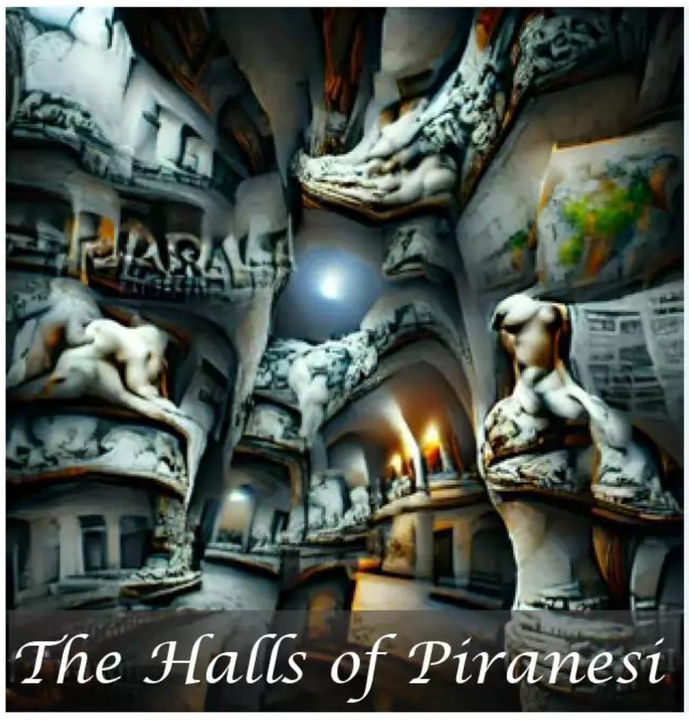
It sounds like recordings of an electromagnetic dawn chorus, which is a phenomenon you can pick up on shortwave radio. It's the sort of sound Chris Watson would use on early Cabaret Voltaire records, but on this piece, there are strange tunes being played on a primitive string instrument, a broken toy guitar and rubber bands stretched across a wire coat hanger. Very odd, but absolutely unique.

Using two tape machines, Vigneault would record something, play it back in the room over the speakers, and add another layer with the second tape machine, then repeat the process. Very primitive. When you learn that the person responsible for this record took over 100 LSD trips and was inspired by that experience to make this music, it all starts to make sense.

There is another Foreign World release, a cassette-only album from 1983 called 'Primitive Music From Another Place', which is similarly experimental and bizarre.

Robert Vigneault has several other guises – Catharsist, Convulsive Trance and Neutrino Cockpit – and he's been releasing material consistently from the early 1980s right up to today, mostly as part of the cassette scene, but more recently digitally.

There were 500 copies of 'Trying To Escape' pressed, and he's selling unplayed copies for just £10 on Discogs because they've got warping issues. I think he must have boxes of unsold stock, and they've been in storage ever since they were pressed. I believe it's going to be a very valuable record in the future. He's an interesting cat, if you ask me.



OHMA GOD

New foray for LA mic experts

Ohma World are on a mission to reimagine what a studio microphone can be. Originally set up by former employees of the legendary ribbon mic manufacturer AEA, the Los Angeles-based company currently have two core designs on offer – a ribbon and a condenser – with an edge-terminated capsule designed in-house. But things get really interesting when you see the amount of audio and visual customisation on offer, with a myriad of colours available to choose from, as well as a range of carefully designed mesh screens, each of which promise to impart their own distinctive sound to the end product. And offcuts from the machining process are upcycled into jewellery. Prices start at $699.

ohmaworld.com

SOUND ESCAPE

Iconic Argentine composer **Beatriz Ferreyra** performed in London last month, alongside pioneering British sound artist **Natasha Barrett**, whose astonishing new field recording album investigates how 3D electroacoustic music can bring an awareness of our own lived environments. They explain their unique approaches to listening

INTERVIEW: JO HUTTON

BEATRIZ FERREYRA – PHOTO: REINHARD MAYER

Natasha, you recently premiered work from your new album, 'Reconfiguring The Landscape'. Can you tell us a bit about it?

"The album is based on five site-specific 3D urban sound installations, where I play the recorded material back into its original site to listen to the environments in more interesting ways. The hope is that I'm not just sampling a place, but understanding its history and how people live in it.

"The recordings for 'Presence' [the third track on the album] are from Oslo's Akershus Fortress, where many resistance fighters were executed during the Second World War. History is bound up in its thick stone walls and my sounds imply that history… footsteps become marching steps, and you hear Norway's evocative air-raid siren tests that all simultaneously trigger twice a year around the country with this massive noise resonating across the landscape. I recorded one yesterday from my balcony."

The recordings on the album all tend to include random interruptions from people…

"Yes, in urban settings there are people and they are tricky, because you don't want to record their private conversations! There's a lovely recording in 'Venice 2' where nuns are singing privately inside a church. I didn't want to go in and interfere, so I stood outside recording the exterior acoustics, and then a bloke came along playing techno music, which was great. A boat arrived and I thought it messed up the recording, but back in the studio I realised the boat's pitch coincidentally tuned with the singing. It's a wonderful recording!

"All the sounds around us have a melody. If you hit a single stone it doesn't have pitch, but when you combine things in a relative pitch relationship to each other, our ears instinctively find melodies."

NATASHA BARRETT

Could you explain what it means to record in 3D sound?

"I use a 32-channel Eigen microphone, where you just have to find a sweet spot to place it. I check that everything's working, but I can't do anything to change the microphone direction or improve the sound until later in the studio, so I'm able to just sit and listen without headphones.

"'Higher order' ambisonics means recording more defined angles of the space for your 3D representation of the sound field. You 'de-code' the recording in the studio and project the sounds through many loudspeakers. Interestingly, most of the software and plugins for creating 3D sounds are free, because the patent for the ambisonics code ran out a long time ago. Since you can't re-patent something, companies can't make money from it, so there's a strong and growing community of ambisonics users."

Do you have a preferred microphone for making field recordings?

"If I'm on a bike or a mountaineering safari, then I don't take the Eigenmike! I'll chuck a Zoom in my backpack – whatever gear suits the occasion. I don't take material from the internet. I need to have been there and absorbed the smells, the temperature, the wind, whether with people or alone. It's the whole experience that matters."

Beatriz, tell us about the two pieces you played at Iklectik?

"Each piece has its own unique sounds. I never repeat anything in another piece. The simplest manipulations are best, with careful mixing. For 'Esprits De La Terre' I used little earthy sounds and wind, things like that. 'Pas De Trois' is a three-step ballet dance – a little joke made from manipulated recordings of people talking, laughing, shouting, whispering."

What techniques did you use?

"I have 60 years' worth of recordings that I transform in my computer using very simple audio tools. The transposition from high pitch to low pitch is incredible – it completely transforms the sound – and then I filter it.

"I work very intuitively. I don't rationalise. I just put myself in a situation of quiet concentrated listening, and I gradually start to hear sounds and see forms, colours and movement in my head. Afterwards, I try to represent this with my sounds. It's always an adventure!"

Your concerts are based on the perception of sounds moving around the room. How do you create this?

"I record my sounds – outside or inside, mechanical or nature – with a stereo Zoom recorder, and then I manipulate them in my studio. I have eight small loudspeakers suspended around me, and I sit and work on my computer in the middle.

"But I spatialise more with my *imagination* than with equipment. It's better to imagine the movement first and then sometimes you create something very different to what you intended. Imagination is a very good tool, you know."

Natasha Barrett's 'Reconfiguring The Landscape' is out now on Persistence Of Sound

In 1977, **Gavin Lloyd Wilson** was a Pembrokeshire schoolboy fascinated by a spate of strange local UFO incidents. His 2021 album, 'Something Strange Came Out Of The Skies', took its inspiration from this now-infamous "Welsh Triangle" of sightings

WORDS: BOB FISCHER

"I was 13 at the time, and I learned about the Broad Haven UFO sightings from 'John Craven's Newsround'," remembers Gavin Lloyd Wilson. "Broad Haven was 10 miles away from where we lived, near Haverfordwest, so my ears pricked up."

In February 1977, this unassuming corner of South Wales became the subject of a media frenzy following a bizarre occurrence in a primary school playground. When 16 children claimed to have seen a silver-suited spaceman emerging from a cigar-shaped UFO in the trees behind their school field, the incident was taken seriously by their headteacher and the story was swiftly picked up by BBC One's primetime children's news bulletin.

"Later, one of the boys who saw the UFO started at my secondary school," continues Gavin. "David Davies. He still gives interviews about it today. I can remember asking him about it, and he was absolutely matter-of-fact – 'Oh yeah, that's what I saw'. I couldn't ridicule him because he was so serious, although I think he suffered for it afterwards – it was a very violent school!"

Predictably, the national media flocked to Pembrokeshire to greet their potential new alien overlords. The Coombs family of Ripperston Farm reported a seven-foot being in a black visor lurking outside their farmhouse window, and were understandably perturbed when a herd of cows seemed to mysteriously teleport across several miles of pasture. A typically understated headline in The Sun newspaper cemented the area's reputation as a weirdy hotspot – "SPACEMAN MYSTERY OF THE TERROR TRIANGLE".

"My main reaction was, 'Why didn't I see something?'," laughs Gavin. "I was obsessed with science fiction and a massive 'Doctor Who' fan."

To add insult to injury, when the saucers returned that summer, it was Gavin's older sister Belinda who was granted an exclusive encounter.

"She had a UFO sighting in July 1977," he recalls. "And she was also very matter-of-fact about it. She'd been out for the afternoon with her boyfriend, and she just came back and said, 'We saw a UFO!'. And again, you couldn't argue. She wasn't a liar, and she wasn't given to flights of fancy."

Meanwhile, Gavin was becoming fascinated by the more fantastical realms of progressive rock, and by the 1980s he'd formed a workplace band with the unlikely name, Spurious Transients.

"A bunch of us worked as computer programmers for a company called BNF Metals in Oxfordshire," he explains. "By chance, we were nearly all would-be musicians. A guy called Simon Trew ordered an MPC1 drum machine from the back pages of Electronics & Music Maker magazine, and it wasn't working properly, so he brought it into work and we spent days messing around with it. That's where the name Spurious Transients came from. You'd try to trigger it, and you'd get a long delay… then it would do something else entirely!"

An hour-long live recording from 1988 called 'Helicopter Hat' is available on the Spurious Transients Bandcamp page, and comprises two splendid 31-minute wig-outs titled, 'When Used In Conjunction With The Helicopter

Hat There's A Complete Absence Of Erroneous Sonic Pollution' – parts one and two, obviously.

"We'd been listening to Gong," shrugs Gavin.

By the 1990s, Gavin had adopted the Spurious Transients name for his own solo recordings, but it wasn't until a 2018 celebration of oddness in a Cheshire village hall that memories of both his and Belinda's teenage experiences were reignited.

"I'd almost forgotten about the UFOs until I went to the 'Weird Weekend North', where the ufologist Steve Mera mentioned the 1977 Welsh sightings," he recalls. "My sister was there with me, and she stuck her hand up at the end of his talk and said, 'I saw something that year as well'.

"I'd been wanting to combine a musical project with a Fortean topic for a long time, and I had an idea for a seven-inch single about Gef The Talking Mongoose. Originally, 'Something Strange Came Out Of The Skies' was just going to be the B-side, but then it grew and grew until it became an album."

The resulting 2021 opus (named after a line in that original 'John Craven's Newsround' report) is a glorious, sprawling concept album of psychedelic delights, with a cast of local actors reciting authentic 1977 eyewitness reports. From the self-explanatory 'Bovine Bilocation' to 'The Silver Giants', all angles of this curious episode are covered with wry humour and no little musical flair. Touchingly, Gavin also persuaded his sister to record her own memories of her brief teenage brush with the distinctly otherworldly.

"It just suddenly seemed to appear, this object," recalls Belinda, amid the swirling synths of 'Mystery Object Over Llangwm'. "I can only liken it to a sausage or a cigar. It was silver, metallic, like a plane fuselage with rounded ends…"

"A previously unpublished account!" says Gavin, proudly. "The recording was a nice diversion, because she was having chemotherapy at the time. We just chatted, and she went through what she saw. She was ever so brave. She never once complained about having cancer. And today is actually the third anniversary of her passing."

Oh, gosh – sorry.

"It's not a problem," he smiles. "I want to remember her, and to talk about her. She always encouraged my musical projects."

And, 46 years on, what does Gavin think actually *happened* in South Wales in 1977? He pauses for thought.

"Part of me thinks it's true… and part of me thinks it can't be true!" he admits. "People certainly saw things, but what they saw – I can't even begin to imagine. It's just so crazy. Almost like it was a mass hallucination. This is why I'm interested in ufology – I'm not a believer in extraterrestrials visiting us, as such, but I'm interested in why people see these things."

'Something Strange Came Out Of The Skies' is available at spurioustransients.bandcamp.com

ON YOUR BIKE

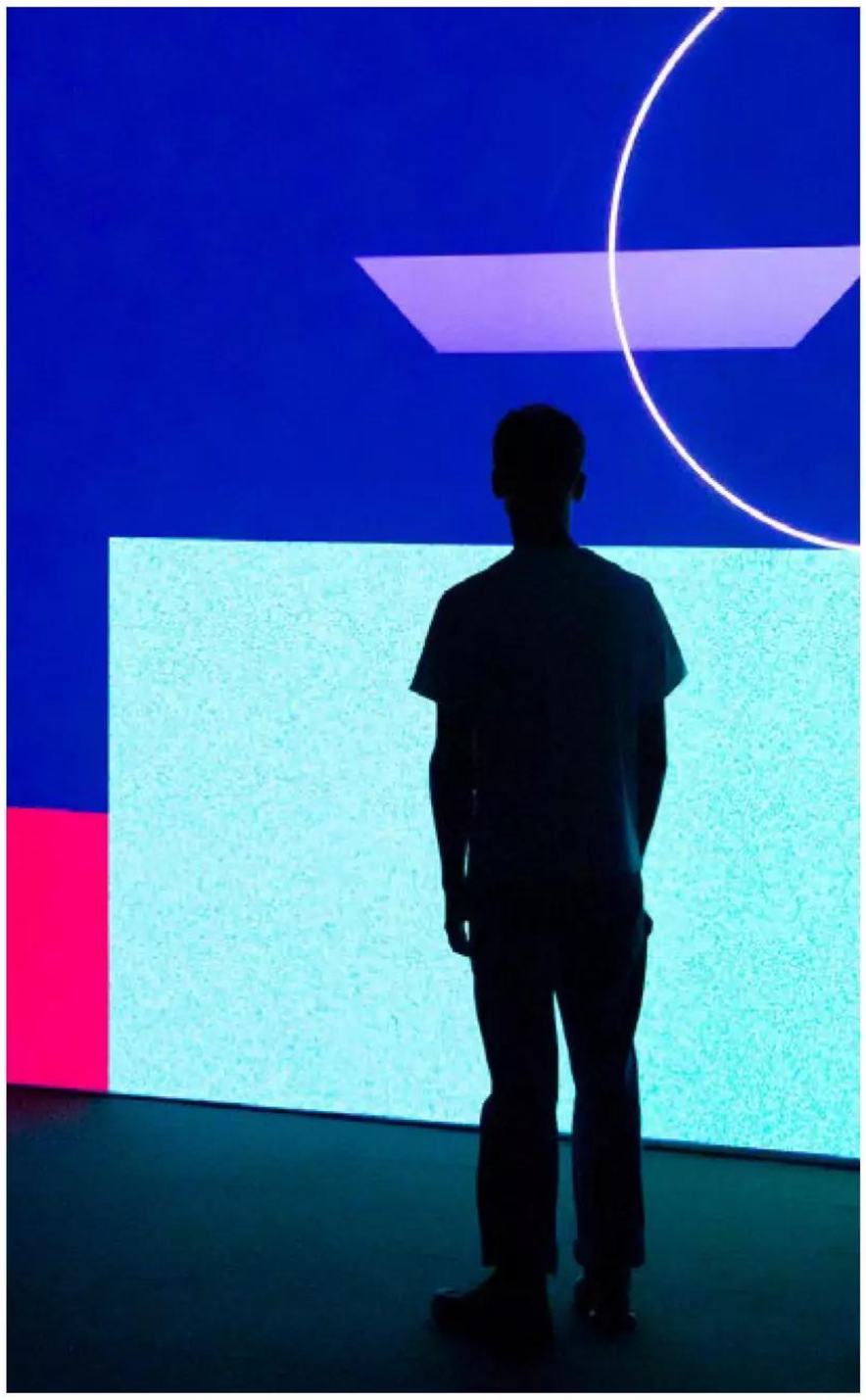
Roland 808 BMX under the hammer

In celebration of hip hop's 50th anniversary and 808 Day 2023 (held on 8 August), the lifestyle division of Roland auctioned this one-of-a-kind drum machine-themed BMX. Bidding started at £641.65 and it eventually sold for £3,639. All the proceeds are being put towards sponsoring a student through the 1500 Sound Academy programme, a music education organisation based in Los Angeles. **rolandlifestyle.shop**

CALL OF THE WILD

Collab with Bernie Krause at 180 Studios

Explorative immersive art collective United Visual Artists have unveiled 'UVA: Synchronicity', their largest exhibition to date at 180 Studios on The Strand, London. Eight new large-scale, sense-expanding works promise to challenge perceptions of reality with deft manipulation of light, space and sound, plus a smorgasbord of custom-made kinetic instruments, sculptures, performance and "novel technologies". Most exciting for ES readers will likely be a new audiovisual installation created in collaboration with vaunted bio-acoustician and soundscape artist Bernie Krause (of Beaver & Krause fame), which explores the sonic relationship between humans and animals. It runs until 17 December and tickets cost £20. **180studios.com**

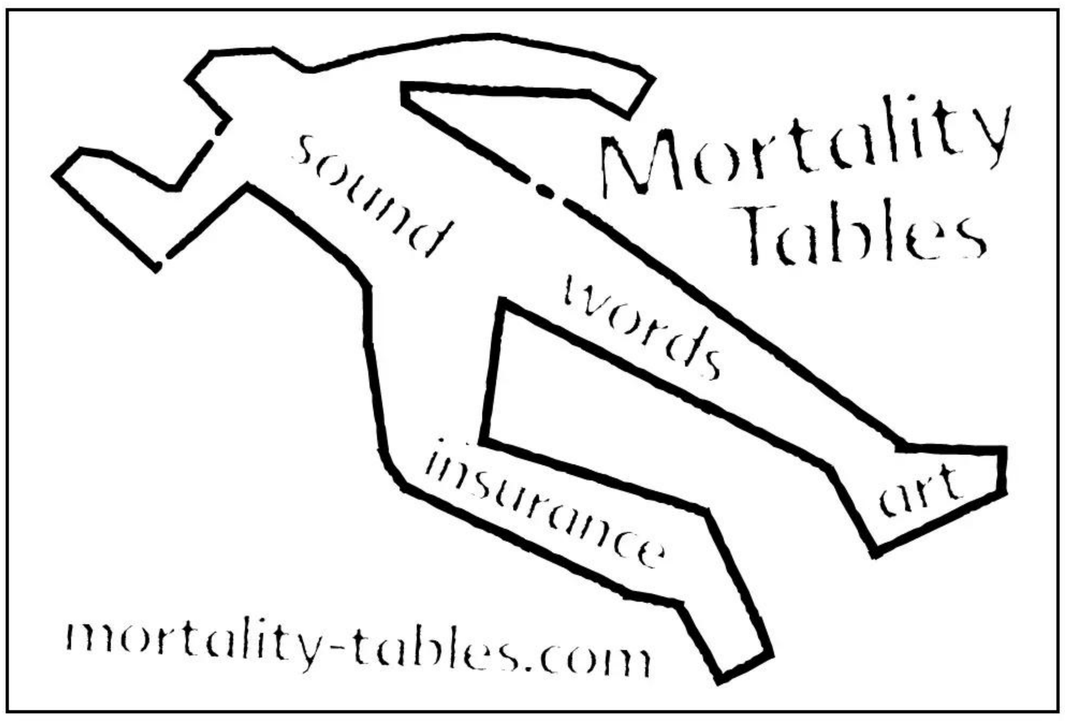


LISTEN HERE, KID

Music platform premieres exciting feature

Streaming platform Bandcamp have announced a new feature called Listening Parties, which allows musicians to announce a release, schedule an online gathering and listen to their music from start to finish alongside fans.

Artists also provide a full tracklist and liner notes if they so choose, and a live chat facility allows them to interact with the audience in real time, sharing insights into the music that listeners might not get otherwise. And the best bit? It's all totally free. **bandcamp.com**



ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE

THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF ‘DOCTOR WHO’ IS A DIAMOND OPPORTUNITY TO CELEBRATE THE WORK OF AN EQUALLY ECCENTRIC BRITISH INSTITUTION – ONE WITH INEXTRICABLE LINKS TO THE COSMOS’ FAVOURITE TIME LORD. IN A NEW INTERVIEW, BRIAN HODGSON, DICK MILLS, ROGER LIMB, PETER HOWELL, PADDY KINGSLAND AND MARK AYRES TAKE A JOURNEY BACK THROUGH THE STRANGE AND COMPELLING HISTORY OF THE BBC RADIOPHONIC WORKSHOP

WORDS: BOB FISCHER

"I first came across Desmond Briscoe on the moon!" laughs Dick Mills. "'Plot On The Moon' was a radio serial about two mad scientists who went to the moon and – as you do – fell in love with a Moon Maiden. Nature took its course, and one of the scientists came back to Earth pregnant. And I thought, 'This is a slice of everyday future life!'. So I fitted in quite well when I went to the Radiophonic Workshop."

The story of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop? Surely one of the greatest artistic sagas of the 20th century. And, for that matter, the 21st century. And probably beyond. As fans worldwide celebrate the 60th anniversary of 'Doctor Who', it feels entirely appropriate to also raise a hearty modulated cheer for the strange, beautiful corner of the BBC whose adventures still feel inextricably linked to those of a certain eccentrically dressed Time Lord.

Both institutions share a gloriously cranky ethos – idiosyncratic, groundbreaking, relentlessly inventive, even gently anti-establishment. But the Radiophonic Workshop got there first, founded in 1958 by Desmond Briscoe and Daphne Oram to produce delightfully strange noises for a whole range of BBC radio and television programmes.

Technical assistant Dick Mills wasn't *quite* there at the start, but he wasn't far off. He has fond memories of his one-time boss.

"Desmond was a man of many surprises," recalls Dick. "When he was in the army, he got himself excused from parades on account of there being something wrong with his feet. Flat feet or ingrowing toenails, or whatever. He never wore regulation shoes, he wore black sandals. Ceremonial sandals, highly polished!

"Rumour had it that he'd been a member of the Household Cavalry and was based in Windsor Castle with Her Majesty, who he claimed had her own pet name for him. And so, we suspect, did the rest of the castle! He actually inferred that he'd taught Her Majesty how to ride a horse…"

It was a period when the exciting potential of new technology went hand-in-hand with the growing optimism of a Britain rapidly emerging from post-war austerity. Young people across the country were becoming entranced by the availability of tape machines – including Hertfordshire-born Roger Limb.

"It was about 1957, and there was a school tape recorder being used for language lessons," remembers Roger. "I thought it was a wonderful piece of equipment. And my father was a radio amateur, so there were all sorts of old microphones lying around.

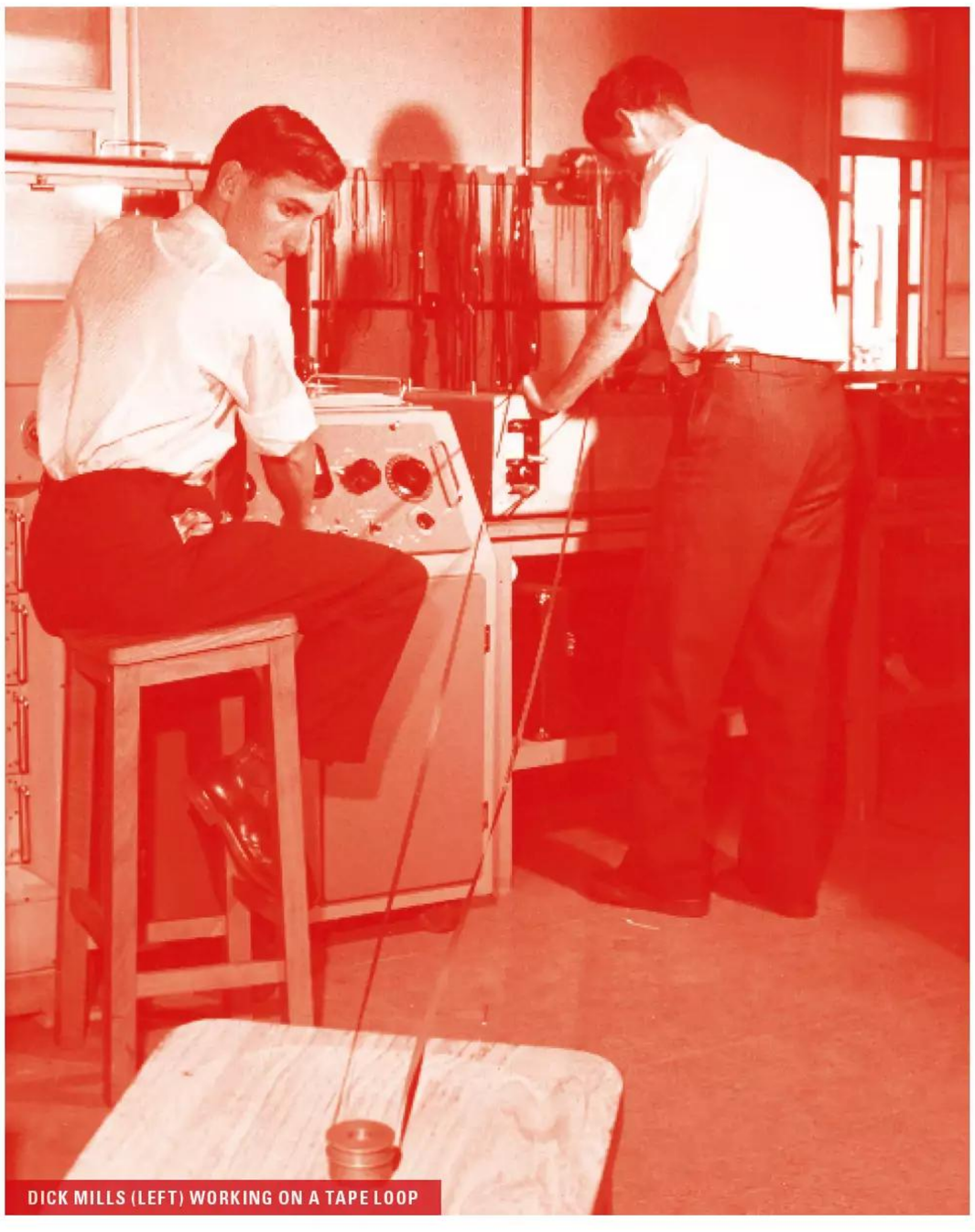
"I managed to persuade the language master to let me take the tape recorder home, and I borrowed one of my father's microphones and did all kinds of evil experiments with sound. So, probably around the very time that Desmond Briscoe and Daphne Oram were starting the Radiophonic Workshop, I was doing my own little bit, aged 16 or 17."

In Liverpool, a young Brian Hodgson was also experimenting with his own reel-to-reel tape machine ("it weighed half a hundredweight"), and his interest in sound manipulation was leading him to soundtrack his National Service in the RAF with some decidedly offbeat BBC radio broadcasts. In particular, 'Private Dreams And Public Nightmares', a 1957 "radiophonic poem" by dramatist Frederick Bradnum, with soundscapes created by both Daphne Oram and Desmond Briscoe.

"I heard an experimental unit was being set up, so I deliberately turned the radio on to listen," says Brian. "I never thought for a minute that I'd eventually work there, but it *was* interesting."

The Radiophonic Workshop officially formed on 1 April 1958, and was given a modest home in the BBC's Maida Vale studio. Only months later, however, Daphne Oram resigned to pursue her own singular career in electronic sound. She was accompanied by engineer Jeannie MacDowell, whose departure created a vacancy filled by the fresh-faced Dick Mills.

Dick's earliest jobs boasted a distinctly otherworldly feel. Shortly after wheeling a portable tape machine ("like a trolley with a ferrograph on top") to the broadcast of 'Plot On The Moon', he was despatched to play in the tape



DICK MILLS (LEFT) WORKING ON A TAPE LOOP

effects created by Desmond Briscoe for Nigel Kneale's notoriously unsettling 1958 TV serial, 'Quatermass And The Pit'. But even the Workshop's more terrestrial commissions were riddled with a delicious streak of oddness.

"Desmond made us promise that we wouldn't allow anyone connected to 'The Goon Show' into the Workshop!" recalls Dick, laughing. "Then he went on leave, and the phone rang, and they said, 'We'd like 'Major Bloodnok's Stomach', please'."

This 1959 composition, an explosive sound collage of burps, pops and peptic blasts, was designed to accompany the alarming gastrointestinal issues faced on a weekly basis by Peter Sellers' blustering military man.

"Jimmy Burnett, who was recording manager for the Melos Ensemble and Julian Bream, let his proverbial hair down," says Dick. "And we made a wonderful montage of disgusting sounds which we then played to the producer. He said 'Absolutely magnificent, but… "The Goon Show" is half an hour long. We can't afford to play your cue every time Major Bloodnok twitches!'. So Jimmy and I had to take a severe razor blade to it, and we got it down to 10 seconds instead of 30…"

Meanwhile, those tape-obsessed youngsters dotted around the country were beginning to drift inexorably towards the BBC. After a spell in repertory theatre, Brian Hodgson was accepted for a position within the corporation's drama department. Here, he was further impressed by the work of a new Radiophonic Workshop recruit, composer Maddalena Fagandini.

"I was working in radio drama, and they were doing an Arthur Adamov play called 'Living Time'," explains Brian. "Maddalena had done all the radiophonic sounds for it, and I was totally blown out of my mind. I then got sent to an engineering indoctrination school, where they tried to pump you full of things like hysteresis and magnetic flux – a complete waste of time. You never needed to know things like that!

"But when I came back, we went on a tour of all the BBC's different departments, including the Radiophonic Workshop, and I applied for an attachment. In those days, you'd usually do three months then get sent back, and the reason it was so short was because a brain surgeon friend of a senior BBC engineer had said, 'If you expose people to these strange sounds, they'll probably get mental illnesses'!"

The Workshop was already evolving. Both Brian and fellow engineering inductee John Baker joined in late 1962, shortly after the arrival of a trainee assistant studio manager who had also decided that her future lay along a different path – Delia Derbyshire. The events that followed have become the stuff of cosmic legend.

When a commission arrived to arrange the theme tune of a vaguely educational science fiction show for children, Derbyshire – with the assistance of Dick Mills – set to work, creating an extraordinary radiophonic interpretation of Ron Grainer's traditional musical score. The show? 'Doctor Who', of course. History records that, on returning from a sun-soaked holiday, Grainer was flabbergasted to hear the resulting arrangement.

"At that time, Ron was Mr Signature Tune," says Dick Mills. "He'd done 'Comedy Playhouse', 'Steptoe And Son', 'Maigret'… he was terrific. But with Delia and me, there was a very high resistance to making anything that might be recognisable. However you press regular instruments into action, they just haven't got the 'what on earth is that?' factor.

"So we got the Workshop engineer to stretch a steel wire the length of a 19-inch blank plate, and that became the thing we twanged. Which then had to be manipulated to form the notes. And the 'Ooo-we-ooo' machine was a wobbulator that Delia managed to play like this… hang on, let me put my hand up…"

He wiggles two fingers with impressive dexterity.

"So there was nothing that forced regular tonal qualities or interludes onto us."

The earliest scores on 'Doctor Who' generally bypassed the Workshop, comprising work by TV composers, stock music and, most strikingly, hair-raising soundtracks by musique concrète pioneer Tristram Cary.

DELIA DERBYSHIRE AND DESMOND BRISCOE

Brian Hodgson, however, created what the closing credits described as the show's "Special Sound". In the Workshop's pre-synthesiser days of experimental tape manipulation, when lampshades and hot water tanks were regular instruments of choice, Brian took the Heath Robinson approach to heart. The infamous TARDIS materialisation sound? The sound of his mother's house key, scraped along a bass piano string. The voices of the Daleks, meanwhile, had their origins in a robotic character from a 1963 radio play.

"Jones the Robot in 'Sword From The Stars'!" laughs Brian. "He was a butler. A bit like C-3PO in 'Star Wars', but he rather pre-dated that. I used my own voice and modulated it, but not very deeply. So when the Daleks came along, I thought, 'I'll see what happens if I modulate it deeper'.

"Then [voice actor] Peter Hawkins arrived, and he was just brilliant. We did some tests with a ring modulator and the old BBC commentator's mic that covers your mouth, and I said, 'You're going to have to elongate the vowels, so you can hear the modulation – it doesn't work on consonants'. The Dalek voice just appeared out of nowhere. That was it.

"Oh, and my boyfriend had a corgi dog that we used to play-fight with. She became a monster on several 'Doctor Who' stories…"

With 'Doctor Who' now eliciting waves of "Dalekmania" in school playgrounds, the Workshop's future stalwarts were beginning to find their musical feet in an eclectic array of bands. For Roger Limb, this meant a burgeoning career as a jazz bassist and keyboard player, and an encounter with a pioneer of recorded sound.

"I left college in 1963, and joined a band in Cheltenham," says Roger. "The bandleader, Bill Nile, somehow got in touch with Joe Meek – who was also a Gloucestershire boy. We went off to Holloway Road and did some recordings for him. I don't think he was really interested in our music, but he was very friendly. He showed us how he'd made 'Telstar', and the bathroom in which he'd invented a new way of creating reverb!

"I was temporarily living in London at the time. On a couple of occasions I went back and had an interesting half hour with him, talking about music. And then he gave me a disc, and said, 'Take this back to the boys, learn this tune and come back and play it for me'."

So, in an alternate universe, you could have been the new Tornadoes?

"We listened to it, and it was a load of rubbish," shrugs Roger. "So we never followed it up."

Meanwhile, in rural Hampshire, a young Paddy Kingsland was becoming oddly passionate about the art of creative dismantling.

"I'd go to jumble sales and pick up old valve radio sets, then take them to bits," recalls Paddy. "There were lots of elderly people in my village who didn't have much money. When they took their radios to be repaired, the shop would say, 'Oh, it's too old, you need a new one – which we'll gladly sell to you!'. But I'd always find a valve to plug in and keep them going a bit longer.

"It was also quite funny to put on the BBC News, with its pompous voice, and at a *particularly* pompous moment my friend and I would blow up the radio with the rather dodgy chemicals we'd put together."

Paddy's musical passions were being sparked by the chart success of The Shadows. Inspired to play guitar, he formed a band with a very similar moniker – The Strangers.

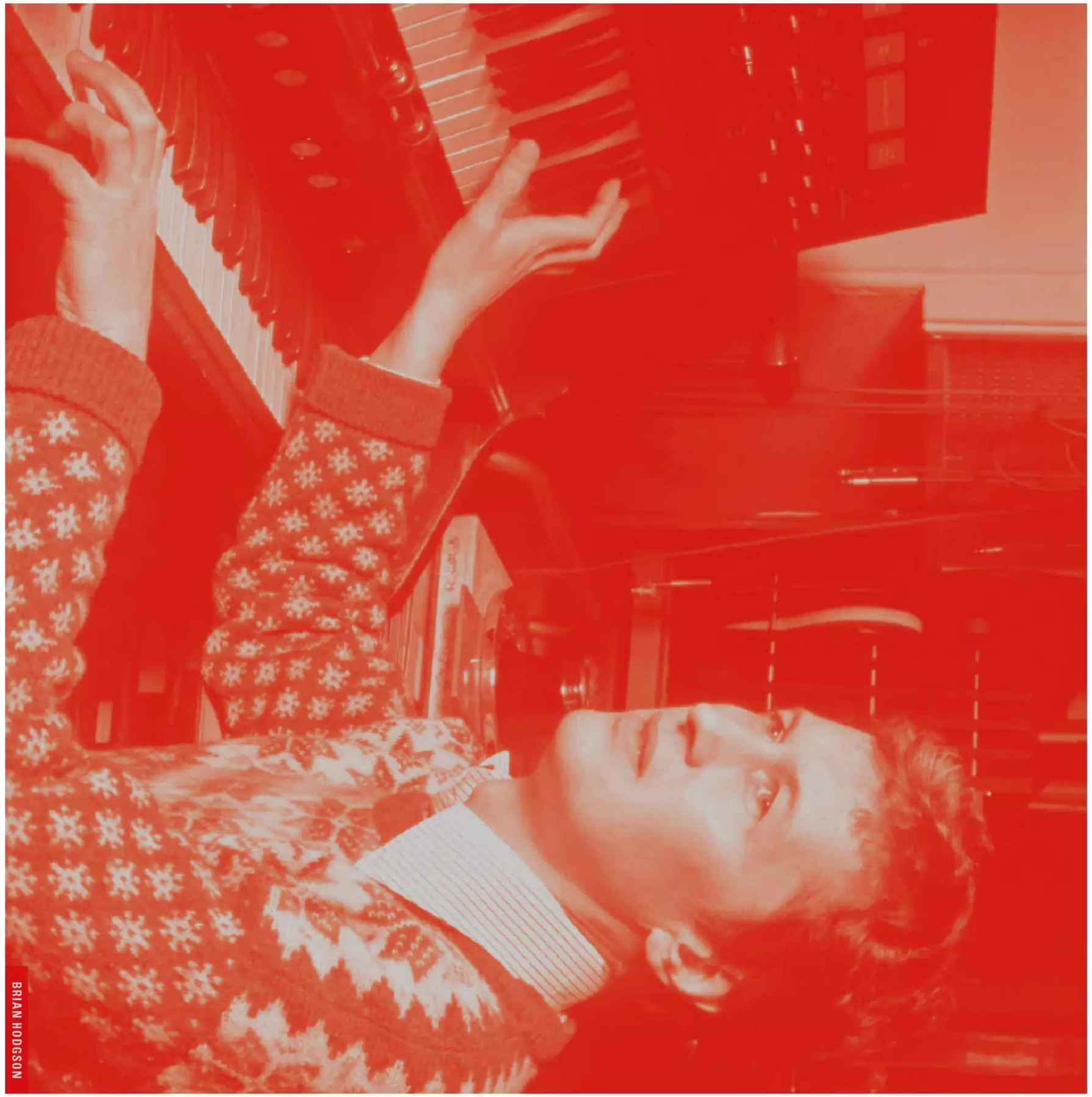
"Fender guitars looked great and sounded completely different to the guitars all the jazz people were using," smiles Paddy. "They were really twangy and echoey. The jazz thing… they were interested in the notes and the music, but we were interested in what it *sounded* like. Which, in many ways, is what electronic music is about. But the stuff I was doing had great simplicity compared to what Roger was up to."

Nevertheless, early links were being forged between the Radiophonic Workshop and the burgeoning 1960s pop scene. By the middle of the decade, Paul McCartney was discussing an (ultimately fruitless) re-working of 'Yesterday' with Delia Derbyshire. And in 1966, together with Brian Hodgson and early synth pioneer Peter Zinovieff, Derbyshire formed Unit Delta Plus, an independent outfit intended to produce their own brand of electronic music.

On 28 January 1967, the sounds of the Radiophonic Workshop and The Beatles finally collided. The 'Million Volt Light And Sound Rave' was a multimedia event at London's Roundhouse, featuring the work of Unit Delta Plus, and the only public airing of a 14-minute sound collage produced by all four members of The Beatles. In the intervening 53 years, it has remained resolutely unreleased and un-bootlegged. So is Brian Hodgson one of the few people in the world to have heard 'Carnival Of Light'? The answer… sort of.

"We were asked if we could take the tape along to the Roundhouse," remembers Brian. "It was delivered to the Workshop with no leaders on it, so we didn't know if it was forwards or backwards. We had a listen, and we still didn't know! But we took it along – and it was utter fucking chaos at the Roundhouse that night. You wouldn't believe it. People were screaming and shouting, running in all directions, and nobody really knew what was going on.

"So I'm afraid Delia and I handed over the tape and pissed off to the pub."



BRIAN HODGSON

By the late 1960s, Paddy Kingsland had given up a career as a BBC studio manager to join the next generation of Radiophonic Workshop recruits. A chance encounter with Roger Limb – also now a BBC studio manager – led to a friendship that has flourished for over five decades. Where did they first meet?

"My memory is Bush House Overseas Services in about 1968," says Roger. "We bumped into each other, and mentioned that we both had an interest in music. From time to time, we'd meet in a studio with our guitars – together with one or two other bodies – and we'd have a jam session. I think Paddy enjoyed it as much as I did."

"In those days, the hierarchy actually thought it was rather a good thing for people to experiment in studios," adds Paddy. "I remember there being a version of the comedy record 'They're Coming To Take Me Away, Ha-Haaa!', with the lyrics based around Bush House and how it drove you nuts to work there. And another bit of editing, where an announcer saying 'The British Broadcasting Corporation' was instead made to say 'The British Broadcorping Castration'."

Supplementing this new influx of Workshop inductees was musique concrète enthusiast (and yet another former studio manager) Malcolm Clarke. For two Workshop stalwarts, however, the passion was beginning to wane. Brian Hodgson and Delia Derbyshire had continued to explore outside musical interests – including 1969's classic White Noise album, 'An Electric Storm' – but both were now feeling jaded. By early 1973, they had left the BBC. Brian recalls, during his final days at Maida Vale, arduous shifts lasting long into the night.

"We only had two studios, so that was the only way you could get anything done," he explains. "I got to the point where I thought, 'If I hang around here, I'm going to end up as a piss artist'. If I was working at night and Delia was there, there'd always be bottles of wine passed backwards and forwards.

"Delia was becoming more and more disillusioned with the Workshop, and I think the final straw came when the Tutankhamun thing happened. She'd planned a whole progression, then was suddenly told that Episode 10 was now Episode One, and Episode Six was… you know. So she was pissed-off as well."

BBC Two's 13-part documentary series 'Tutankhamun's Egypt' was broadcast in the spring of 1972. Despite her frustrations, Derbyshire's theme music is a haunting piece of work, incorporating a 1939 recording of a silver trumpet recovered from the legendary pharaoh's excavated burial chamber. She was assisted by Roger Limb, freshly arrived in the department after a stint as an on-air continuity announcer.

"I think she'd reached the stage of her career where it was difficult to find new ways of approaching projects," says Roger. "When I arrived at the Workshop, I sat in with all the producers, and Delia and I hit it off. That wonderful evocation of Tutankhamun's trumpet still gives me a little frisson when I hear it. But she was probably past her most creative spell by then. What do you think, Paddy?"

"By that time, she was – let's be honest – drinking too much," agrees Paddy. "Plus… there were lots of very keen young people who were very good at fiddling around with synthesisers. I think Delia was quite daunted by the synthesisers. She didn't like them very much. It took an awful lot of effort to get good at them, and she saw the limitations – and they *were* very limited at the time."

It was, they both agree, a period of changing culture at the Radiophonic Workshop, with traditional tape manipulation techniques finally giving way to newer technology.

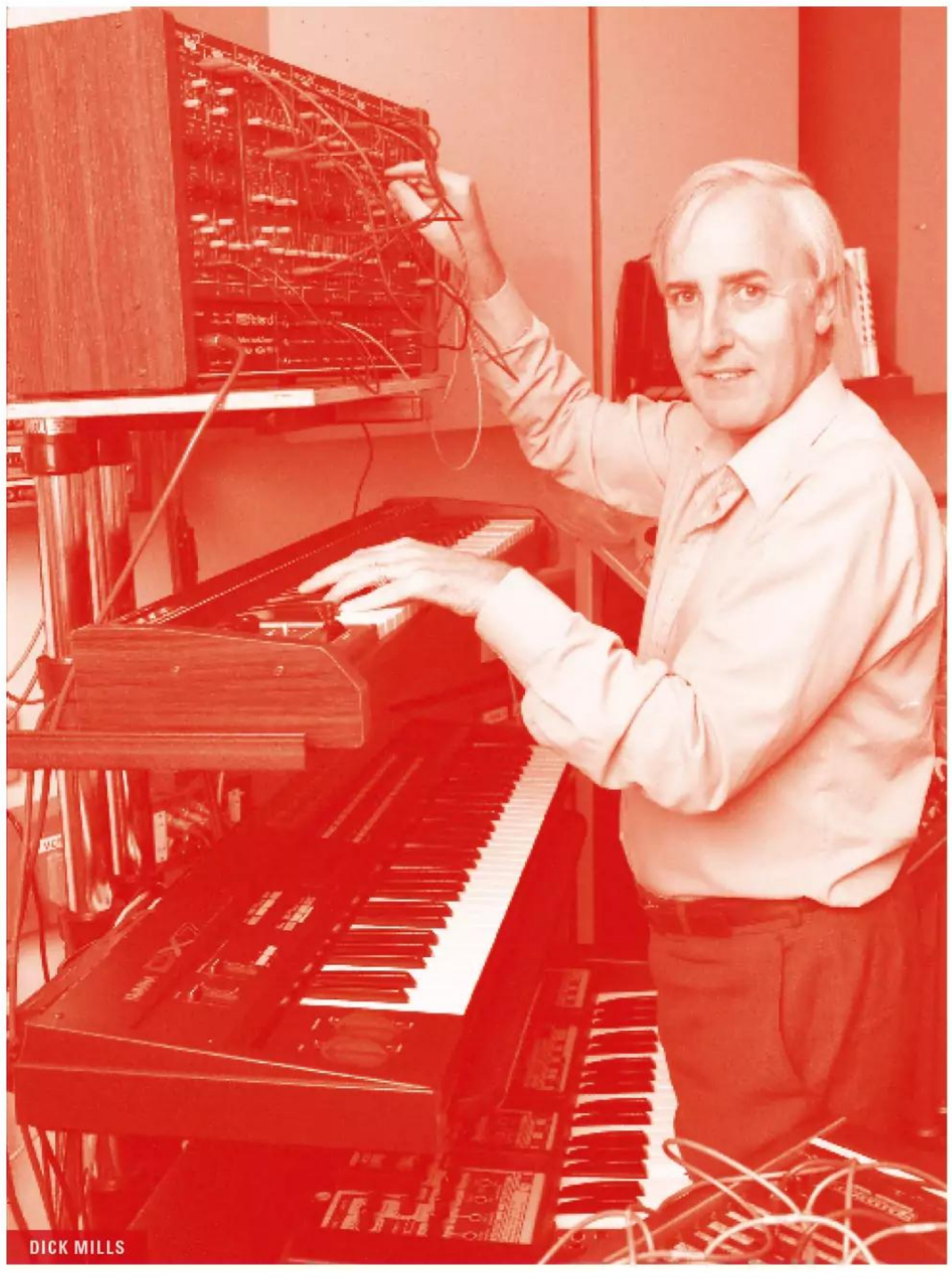
"Delia didn't take to the new breed of synths, like the VCS 3," nods Roger. "She was a tape manipulation person. I only arrived at the end of that era, and I did it with a certain amount of interest. But the VCS 3 was on the horizon… and the EMS Synthi 100, which was remarkable. The VSC 3 was almost hand-held, but the Synthi 100 had its own room, and I don't remember Delia ever working on it."

Over in the Sussex countryside, another musically minded youngster had already teamed up with schoolfriend John Ferdinando to record a string of rather splendid DIY folk-rock albums. Unfamiliar with the work of Agincourt and Ithaca? Check out Cherry Red's excellent CD compilation 'A Game For All Who Know', not least because the original 50-year-old vinyl now goes for the price of a decent second-hand car – much to the surprise of Peter Howell, the man behind it all.

"My father, who was a solicitor in Hove, had a handyman – Mr Davies – who did everything for him," remembers Peter. "There was a gap of six weeks when he didn't have much to do, so he came up and turned the spare bedroom into a studio for me! John and I made five LPs and pressed 50 copies of each, because that was the minimum they would do. We actually wanted 30, because we could only think of 30 people who'd want to buy them."

Joining the BBC in 1970, Peter quickly became a member of the in-house amateur dramatics society, The Ariel Players. After providing the music for 'Seaplay', a stage production telling the story of a Cold War-obsessed fish called Solomenti, he was persuaded to apply for an attachment to the Radiophonic Workshop.

DELIA DERBYSHIRE IN 1965


DICK MILLS

"I absolutely loved it, and the first person I met was John Baker – and his puppy, which he wasn't allowed to have in the building!" laughs Peter. "Then I went down the corridor and met Dick. He was ever-present in Room 12, in among more jack leads than I'd ever seen in my life. It looked like a telephonist's nightmare.

"It was regarded as a bit of a 'loony bin' by a lot of people in Broadcasting House. Some of the studio manager friends I'd left behind were genuinely surprised I could stand it. To me, it was a dream come true, but to them it was the weirdest thing – 'He's lost it!'."

Throughout the 1970s, 'Doctor Who' was not – amazingly – the most prolific client of the Radiophonic Workshop. That honour fell to an array of BBC daytime educational programmes, from early literacy shows like 'Look And Read' to issue-based teenage dramas like 'Scene'. For a whole generation of 70s children, the sound of the Synthi 100 and VSC 3 is inextricably linked to the taste of Lucozade and the interminable itching of chickenpox scabs.

"We did no end of music for those shows," says Paddy Kingsland. "Little dramas like 'Joe And The Sheep Rustlers'… these things were often produced by Andrée Molyneux, who was a very forward-thinking and committed producer. I think the BBC wanted to instil a few values into children and teenagers – being positive, being good to other people. Showing children who maybe didn't have that input from home what it was like to have relationships."

Roger Limb was an equally enthusiastic composer for BBC Schools.

"As soon I joined the Workshop, I launched into 'Look And Read'," says Roger. "And I was learning on the job how to do incidental music. I think one of the reasons it was put into my in-tray was that I'd proved to Delia and perhaps Desmond that I could write a tuneful song or two. And a lot of the songs in these shows were teaching songs – showing how letters leap in and out of words and change the *sound* of those words."

And what of the kids? The generation of tank top-wearing 1970s youngsters rapt in front of their new colour tellies? In Tunbridge Wells, 11-year-old 'Doctor Who' fan Mark Ayres found the music from Jon Pertwee's 1972 series making a life-changing impression on him – in particular Malcolm Clarke's abrasive Synthi 100 score for the 'The Sea Devils'.

"I had an epiphany moment," remembers Mark. "'The Sea Devils' was a 'bloody hell!' moment for me. I loved everything that people hate about it now. The fact that, half the time, you can't tell the sound effects from the music. The fact that it's completely batshit insane. It's the sound of a complete anarchist maverick fighting with a piece of technology that doesn't really work properly. All of that stuff, I adored. And, at that point, I decided it was what I'd quite like to do.

"Then in 1977, when I was 16, I went to the first 'Doctor Who' convention in a church hall in Battersea. And I met Dick Mills and [special effects designer] Mat Irvine. Mat immediately offered me and my mate Steve Ocock a chance to see the visual effects department, so we blagged a day off school. Afterwards, Mat sat us in his office with a cup of tea and asked what we were interested in. I said, 'I like the Radiophonic Workshop', and he said, 'Hang on…', and rang Dick Mills. 'Dick, remember that lad Mark we met at the convention? He'd like to come and have a look'. So the following week I went back, and there was Dick Mills with a VCS 3. These were just *lovely* people."

JOHN BAKER

Following Malcolm Clarke's controversial score for 'The Sea Devils', 1970s 'Doctor Who' settled into a more conventional musical groove. The overwhelming bulk of the decade's scores were provided by Australian composer Dudley Simpson, with Dick Mills taking over Brian Hodgson's responsibilities as purveyor of the show's otherworldly "Special Sound". And while Dudley was no stranger to the occasional synth flourish, the traditional brass and timpani he chose to accompany Tom Baker's adventures became the defining sound of 1970s TARDIS travel.

Until, that is, incoming producer John Nathan-Turner decided to freshen up the show's music. It was a revolution that swiftly followed the unexpected return of Brian Hodgson, this time as the Radiophonic Workshop's official "Organiser". Brian had spent the intervening years busily running his own independent studio, Electrophon, and had formed – alongside musician friend John Lewis – a melodic synth outfit named Wavemaker.

"Paddy Kingsland came to see me," remembers Brian. "He said, 'Desmond wants to know if you'd ever consider going back to the Workshop'. I said, 'Yeah, but it would have to be on my own terms'. I went along wearing very casual clothes, I literally turned up for the interview not really giving a fuck whether I got the job or not. And I said if I came back, I wanted a free hand to reorganise the place. I wanted to have it equipped properly, because *I* had better equipment than they had at the Radiophonic Workshop."

Pressing into service a generation of new ARP Odyssey synths, the Workshop were tasked with giving 'Doctor Who' a shimmering musical makeover for Tom Baker's swansong 1980 series. The show's theme had remained largely unchanged since 1963 and – in 1972 – an attempted EMS Synthi 100 reworking had even been nixed by then-producer Barry Letts. This time, the task of attempting a shiny, synth-heavy rejig was handed to Peter Howell. No pressure then, Peter?

"I *did* feel the pressure," admits Peter. "But Paddy was extremely helpful, he was my go-to pair of ears. I'd play bits to him and say, 'If this isn't going anywhere, let's stop now and not waste any more time'. But he kept on nodding, so that was alright. And, as with Delia's version, I didn't want to make anything obvious where people could sit in the pub and say, 'Ah, I know how he did that, he used a Casio thingummybob'. So I made it an amalgam of various techniques."

While the new synths gave the theme a contemporary sheen, Peter still employed some old-school Radiophonic Workshop tape manipulation, incorporating the gentle flutters of a freshly-struck match.

"I was imagining a Catherine wheel, and I wanted it to be an ever-increasing Catherine wheel," he explains. "Which made me think of fire, and of striking a match. So it's a match strike with multiple echoes and build-ups."

"I remember being amazed by it all!" beams Paddy Kingsland. "Peter really did make a good job of it, and it still stands up now."

"I was bowled over by it too," agrees Roger Limb. "I thought it was absolutely wonderful."

The early 1980s became the Radiophonic Workshop's second 'Doctor Who' heyday. Peter, Paddy and Roger were handed the lion's share of scores, with each of them bringing their own distinct musical backgrounds to the show –

folk-tinged elegance, melodic rock invention and stately ambient atmosphere, respectively. They remain characteristically modest about their contributions.

"I enjoyed working on 'Doctor Who'," says Roger. "I was flattered to be part of the team. If you have a good director, it helps a lot with the process – and I had some good directors. My favourite was Graeme Harper, who I did 'The Caves Of Androzani' and 'Revelation Of The Daleks' with.

"The directors usually had an idea of where they wanted music and why, and very often it was to paper over a crack where something hadn't worked!" smiles Paddy. "They all wanted different approaches. Peter Grimwade liked stings, which I hated. You can't get going with them. Although I did manage to get going on the final Tom Baker story, 'Logopolis'. At the end, there was a long cue. But up to that moment it was all 'Pa-dong! Diddly-dong!'."

For Peter Howell, particular pleasure was found in scoring the show's 20th anniversary feature-length special in 1983.

"I loved 'The Five Doctors'," he says. "There was more new technology coming along by that time, and I was able to use a Fairlight on it. And working with Dick was great."

So with Dick Mills and the programme's regular composers now based in adjacent rooms, did meshing the music of 'Doctor Who' with the show's unique sound effects become an easier process?

"We just banged on the walls!" grins Peter. "I think that all of us got used to the way Dick worked and how he looked at a scene. I'd go into the studio and say, 'What are you doing, Dick? Oh, you're doing *that*. OK, I'll go back and do *this*'."

"It was more difficult when the incidental music composers were outside the building," nods Dick. "There was no way I could say, 'You know when the Doctor's got his unmentionables in the mangle again? What are you doing for that?'. Whereas Peter would say, 'I don't really want to do this scene for 20 minutes… could you come up with a hum and give me a breather?'."

"A lot of that went on with 'The Five Doctors'," laughs Peter.

With Malcolm Clarke also returning to provide *slightly* more accessible scores than his opinion-splitting soundtrack to 'The Sea Devils', links between the Radiophonic Workshop and 'Doctor Who' seemed stronger than ever. Further sterling contributions came from more recent Workshop recruits, Jonathan Gibbs and Elizabeth Parker.

Even outside the TARDIS, the department was producing music liable to reduce 1980s viewers to shivering, moist-eyed husks – Paddy Kingsland's 1981 score for 'The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy' and Roger Limb's 1984 soundtrack to the magical children's drama 'The Box Of Delights' ("a privilege", he says) remain totemic slices of the 1980s childhood.

Brian Hodgson, now Head of Department following Desmond Briscoe's 1983 retirement, succeeded in his ambitions to secure extra funding and resources. And a fresh generation of composers was arriving, too.

By the mid-1980s, Mark Ayres was employed as a sound engineer for TV-AM, the company behind ITV's wildly mercurial breakfast show, 'Good Morning Britain'. Narrowly missing out on the chance to produce Roland Rat's 1983 hit single 'Rat Rapping', he was quick to seize other opportunities when they arose.

"I'd met John Nathan-Turner at conventions," recalls Mark. "Then in 1987, my union at TV-AM fell out with management and we all got locked out. And a few months later, sacked. I wrote to everybody I'd ever met in television, and said 'Gissa job'. Genuinely, it wasn't my plan to work on 'Doctor Who' – it was the Radiophonic Workshop's gig, and I didn't feel that was something I could tread on. But John, bless him, said, 'Come and see me'."

Sixteen years after Malcolm Clarke's score for 'The Sea Devils' had fired his imagination, Mark composed his debut 'Doctor Who' soundtrack. The music for the 1988 Sylvester McCoy story 'The Greatest Show In The Galaxy' was the first of three stylish, elegiac scores created by Mark for the classic series' final throes.

PETER HOWELL

MALCOLM CLARKE

"It was daunting, taking on something that I loved so much," says Mark. "I thought, 'I've really got to up my game here'."

But the writing was on the TARDIS wall. The show's original run ended in 1989, and by 1992 the BBC had a new Director General. The John Birt regime brought sweeping changes, including the controversial Producer Choice policy. In-house BBC services were now charged for between departments, and programme-makers were given freedom to select cheaper options from outside the corporation. It was a tactic, says Brian Hodgson, that ultimately spelled the end for the Radiophonic Workshop.

"We'd expanded in Maida Vale, taking over many more square feet than we'd originally had," he recalls. "But now we were being charged for that at West End rates. We were given two years to break even, but nobody could afford to use us. It got to a point where I'd had to get rid of the engineers, and I thought the only people not producing any revenue were myself and my secretary. So I applied for early retirement, which I got."

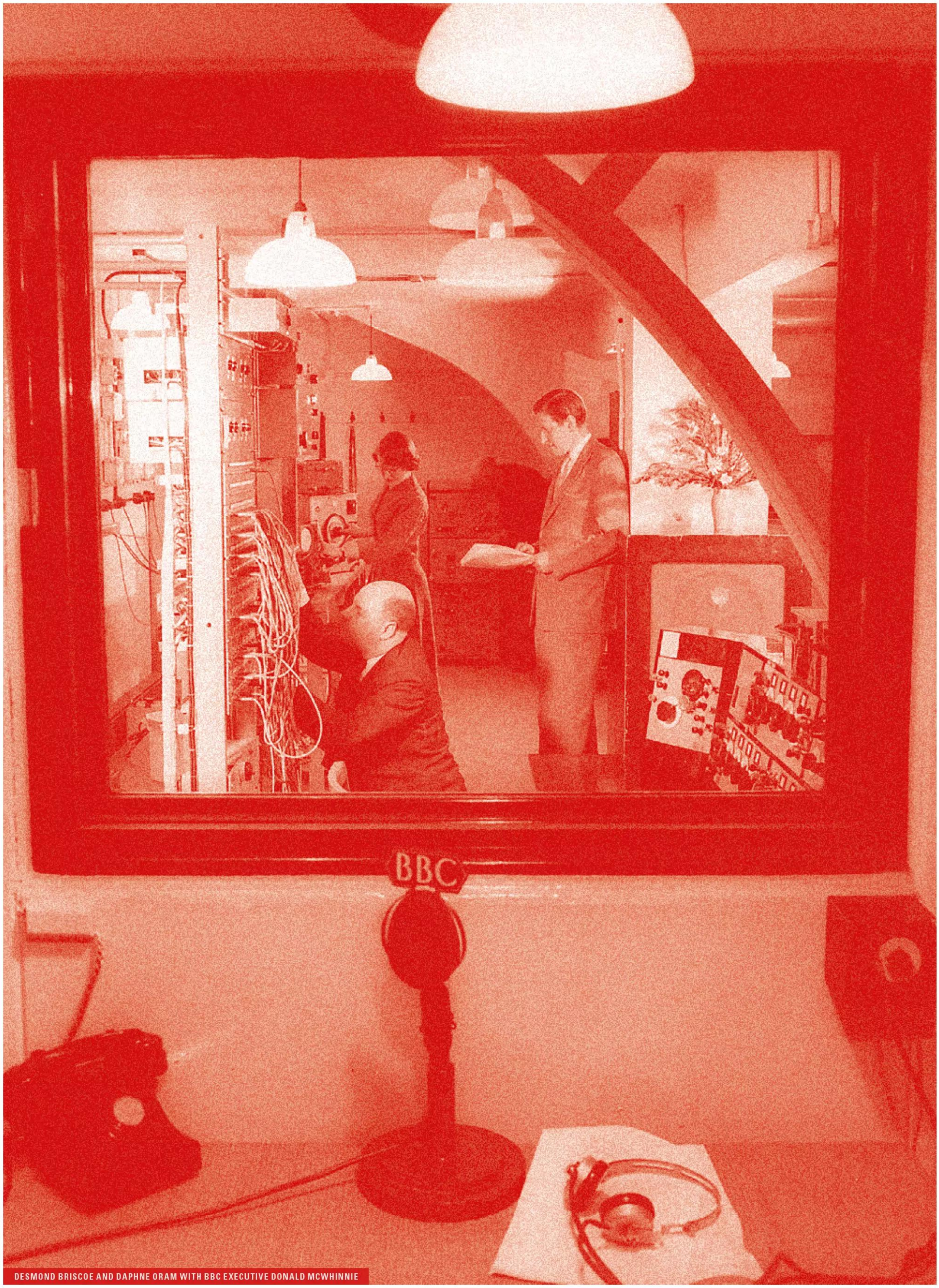
Paddy Kingsland had already departed to run his own studio. For Roger Limb, however, the decision was taken out of his hands.

"A manager came in and said, 'Would you like to leave?'," explains Roger. "And she said it in such a way that the answer was, 'Yes, I *would* like to leave'. I'd already heard on the intercom that 'so-and-so is coming along to have a word with you', and I thought, 'I bet I know what she's going to say'. I left on the same day as Malcolm Clarke and we had a bit of a party in the canteen. There was a cake, with the two of us holding the knife together and cutting it – it looked like a wedding!"

With the Workshop officially disbanded in 1996, ultra-fan Mark Ayres became the saviour of an incredible archive of electronic music – one that was very nearly lost forever.

"I got three phone calls in one day, from Brian, Peter and Paddy," explains Mark. "All saying, 'There are three rooms of tapes that are not properly catalogued, they need saving and we've put your name forward. You're the only person we can think of who knows what's there'. But, when I was about a third of the way through the cataloguing, I was running out of tapes. Things like Paddy's soundtrack for [1975 children's drama] 'The Changes' weren't there. I said, 'This is ridiculous, where have all the tapes gone?'. I was told, 'We've already binned them'.

"Eventually, I was tipped off that I should try the band store, where the instruments for the BBC Symphony Orchestra were kept. I opened the door, and all the missing tapes were there. I later found out one of the engineers had deliberately not ordered the skip, and he'd hidden the tapes where he thought nobody would spot them. So, thank God, we got everything back."



DESMOND BRISCOE AND DAPHNE ORAM WITH BBC EXECUTIVE DONALD MCWHINNIE

THE BBC RADIOPHONIC WORKSHOP AT MAIDA VALE IN 1978

BACK: JOHN DOWNER (ATTACHEE), PETER HOWELL, ROGER LIMB, ELIZABETH PARKER, PADDY KINGSLAND. FRONT: BRIAN HODGSON, DESMOND BRISCOE, DICK MILLS

The story, of course, has a happy ending. Since a "one-off" reunion performance at London's Roundhouse in 2009, a live version of the Radiophonic Workshop – including Mark, Peter, Roger, Paddy and Dick – has performed over 50 shows, bringing their evocative, childhood-defining music from 'Doctor Who' and beyond to huge and frequently weepy-eyed audiences.

But it's not just about nostalgia. Their 2017 album, 'Burials In Several Earths', is a hauntingly ambient collection, and their soundtrack to Matthew Holness' disturbing 2018 horror film 'Possum' is appropriately chilling. There are recent books too. Peter Howell's 'Radiophonic Times' and Paddy Kingsland's 'Rocking At The BBC' are both delightful reads. This unlikely collection of genial eccentrics, all unwaveringly charming and modest, have achieved the almost impossible – they've combined cutting-edge musical and sound experimentation with a popular appeal that has lasted for well over half a century.

Back in those cramped studios in Maida Vale all those decades ago, did they have any idea of the impact they were making?

"If we had, we'd have frozen and been unable to do anything!" laughs Paddy Kingsland. "In the nicest possible way, we just made it up as we went along. One episode of 'Doctor Who' was a week of my life, including the briefing, doing the music and going to the dubbing session to put the episode together. It wasn't a huge chunk of time."

"We never thought about posterity for one second," agrees Roger Limb. "We did the music, it was dubbed, and if it worked – hooray. On to the next one. I never thought that 40 years on I'd be still getting letters about particular phrases I'd used."

For Dick Mills, however, the greatest source of pride comes from bringing avant-garde music and sound design directly into a nation's living rooms at Saturday teatimes.

"At conventions, you get people who say, 'What do you think is the Radiophonic Workshop's greatest contribution to the world?'," he smiles. "And really, I find the Workshop's legacy – for which I'm very grateful – is that it forced audiences, of whatever age, to listen to and accept new artforms. If you throw enough randomness at people, they'll seize on something."

The randomness continues. In November this year, the 60th anniversary episodes of 'Doctor Who' will almost certainly feature noises created by Brian Hodgson back in 1963. When the TARDIS materialises at the beginning of these celebratory new adventures, we'll still hear the manipulated sound of his mother's house key being scraped along a bass piano wire exactly six decades ago.

"I donated that piano to 'Children In Need', and it was bought by a farmer who didn't realise it was only the frame!" grins Brian. "But we screwed my mother's door key to the wooden part of it. It's probably still mouldering away in one of his barns. I'd love to find out where it is now."

The legacy of Desmond Briscoe – ceremonial sandals and all – lives on. Desmond died in 2006, aged 81, and Paddy Kingsland has one final, touching coda to recount.

"We all went to Desmond's funeral," he explains. "And, of course, it was a very sad occasion. But at the very end, Brian Hodgson said, 'And now, wherever his journey in time and space takes him, we wish Desmond well'. Then the crematorium curtains opened, and they played the TARDIS sound effect. It was a very moving thing, but at the same time… it reflected the madness of the Radiophonic Workshop."

THE MOTHER OF INVENTIONS

In the mid-1960s, Delia Derbyshire collaborated with playwright Barry Bermange on 'Inventions For Radio', a series of groundbreaking sound collages. Dr David Butler, curator of the Delia Derbyshire Archive, looks ahead to a forthcoming boxset of these pivotal radiophonic recordings

WORDS: BOB FISCHER

"Delia was working on 'Inventions For Radio' at the same time as 'Doctor Who', so this was a really intense time for her," explains Dr David Butler. "She'd joined the Radiophonic Workshop in April 1962, and been eased in relatively gently. But by 1963, her reputation had really started to grow within the BBC."

This year sees the first-ever official release of 'Inventions For Radio', a compelling series of sound collages broadcast by the BBC's Third Programme radio service in 1964 and 1965. Initiated by playwright Barry Bermange, the series comprised four 45-minute instalments – 'The Dreams', 'Amor Dei', 'The After-Life' and 'The Evenings Of Certain Lives'.

Bermange had collected field recordings of everyday Londoners and home counties residents discussing impressively weighty matters, from the nature of their dreams to their relationship with God and their ideas about the hereafter. Edited into meticulously assembled montages and combined with Delia Derbyshire's sympathetic radiophonic accompaniment, they make for a touching and sometimes unsettling listening experience.

Butler, a senior drama lecturer at Manchester University, is a curator of the Delia Derbyshire Archive and the writer of a forthcoming biography about this most enduringly fascinating radiophonic trailblazer. 'Inventions For Radio', he says, forms a pivotal part of her body of work.

"In the 1960s, Barry Bermange was part of the absurdist theatre movement, alongside people like Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett," explains Butler. "People were touting him as one of the next big things in British theatre, and he had some genuine success. He really is significant, and 'Inventions For Radio' wouldn't have happened without him. But Delia did much more than was acknowledged.

"There's a smoking gun. When 'The Dreams' went out, there was a memo from the BBC's Head of Radio Features saying they'd been impressed by Delia's work, and they were going to commission more from Barry Bermange. Desmond Briscoe, Head of the Radiophonic Workshop, wrote a note saying, 'I would like to discuss Delia's contribution to this programme… *apart from the obvious electronic music*'."

The skilful arrangement of the speech snippets, says Butler, suggest Derbyshire was heavily involved in the editing process, seamlessly weaving metaphysical thoughts from the anonymous users of Hornsea Old People's Welfare Council into her first truly long-form musical compositions. But the result wasn't to everyone's taste. BBC audience reports, collected immediately after the original broadcasts, include complaints from Third Programme listeners about "moronic mumblings" and "self-opinionated nonentities". In 2023, these reactions seem jaw-dropping. By anyone's standards, the members of the public recorded for 'Inventions For Radio' speak with great erudition and articulacy.

"It tells you a lot about the listenership of the Third Programme," says Butler. "The BBC Handbook itself says the Third Programme was seen as having a narrower audience – so you are going to get 'disgusted of Tunbridge Wells' in there. People who have working-class accents discussing the psychology of dreaming, or whether God exists? There seemed to be a feeling that they didn't have the right to talk about those things. It should be a philosopher or a theologian, Aldous Huxley or Malcolm Muggeridge.

"It's easy to over-romanticise that period. With films like 'A Taste Of Honey' and programmes such as 'Coronation Street', working-class voices were coming through, but it didn't happen overnight and there were still prejudiced attitudes around. I think 'Inventions' taps into that, and that's what makes it so remarkable and important."

The series, Butler suggests, also captures a salient moment in Delia Derbyshire's progression as a composer. Devising her arrangements for 'Inventions For Radio', she drew on lessons she had learned at Dartington Hall Summer School – a residential course in contemporary music founded by William Glock, who became the BBC's forward-thinking Controller of Music in 1959. A year before beginning work on 'Inventions', Derbyshire had helped to run a week of educational workshops delivered by a major figure in the electronic music field.

"In August 1962, Delia went away to Dartington and worked with Luciano Berio," says Butler. "And Berio's influence is definitely on 'Inventions' – especially the chopping up and transformation of the human voice. You can tell, when she comes back, that his ideas are flying around in Delia's head. She references him in her notes, and she starts creating graphic scores after seeing Berio use them for his pieces. That experience was massive for her in developing an understanding of electronic music. Prior to that, she'd largely been learning on the job."

With regard to 'Inventions', the relative credit afforded to Bermange and Derbyshire has, says Butler, shifted over the decades to reflect their respective reputations. In the 1960s, Derbyshire's contribution – in accordance with BBC policy of the time – stayed anonymous, covered simply by a catch-all credit for the Radiophonic Workshop. Her first on-air acknowledgement prefaced a 1977 repeat on BBC Radio 4. But since her death in 2001, Butler suggests it's Bermange's vital contributions that have been slightly overshadowed by the surge of interest in Derbyshire's work.

Nevertheless, he nods enthusiastically at the suggestion that 'Inventions' was a project deeply infused with Derbyshire's own personality and her complex upbringing.

"One of the reasons she became so obsessed with music was that it offered an escape from the things that troubled her as a child," he says. "Her parents bought her a piano when she was eight years old, and music completely took over her life. The doodles in her notebooks are often clefs or staves or piano keyboards, and there's one page where she's just written the word 'music' over and over – it's like Jack Nicholson in 'The Shining'!

"When Delia was six, her sister Benita died at the age of four. They'd been evacuated together and had a close bond – they'd barely returned home from the war. So it's very revealing that a lot of Delia's writing about music, both as a child and as a teenager, is repeatedly about its transcendent quality… the ability of music to take you out of this world and into another state.

"In 'The Dreams', 'Amor Dei' and 'The After-Life', it's all there. I think these pieces spoke to her, and she was able to plug into things that had really informed her and her interest in music."

The 'Inventions For Radio' six-LP boxset – with sleeve notes by Dr David Butler and The Radiophonic Workshop's Mark Ayres – will be released by Silva Screen on 17 November

DOG DAZE

‘Black Dog’ is the fourth album from Elizabeth Bernholz under her Gazelle Twin alias. Otherworldly and spooky, it’s haunted by a whole string of her ghosts – childhood memories, the volatile transformations of becoming a parent, mental health and revelations of self-awareness

WORDS: MAT SMITH
PICTURES: TERI VARHOL

For Elizabeth Bernholz, the link between the essential ingredients of ghost stories and the lived experiences of depression and anxiety are obvious. She cites the examples of loop cycles – behaviours that keep repeating themselves until you find some sort of resolution to free you from endless recurrences.

“I find it interesting how that has parallels with exorcism and dispelling ghosts from houses,” she reflects. “This whole album has been an exploration into all of those many connections that I feel exist. I’m interested in ghosts at face value, as well as ghosts as a reflection of our psychological states and our wellbeing. This is an attempt to tie everything together.”

Anyone taking the most cursory survey of Bernholz’s catalogue might expect this subject matter to be dealt with in the unique and idiosyncratic way that made pivotal works like ‘Unflesh’ (2014) and ‘Pastoral’ (2018) so visceral and compelling.

“This is how our story begins. In a dark, dark town there was a dark, dark street. On the dark, dark street, there was a dark, dark house.” (‘Funnybones’ by Janet & Allan Ahlberg, Puffin Books, 1980.) But that’s not where Bernholz’s story begins.

Hers starts in a house in rural Kent in the most south-eastern corner of England, on a long straight road running between two villages. It was an old, run-down Victorian farmhouse in the middle of nowhere that Bernholz’s parents had bought as a fixer-upper, and which would be her childhood home until she was six. While its description might sound like the perfect place for the start of an MR James ghost yarn, Bernholz insists that she has many pleasant recollections of her time there.

Apart from the black dog, that is.

“My memories are those of a child who wakes up at night and goes to their parents’ room and who really feels a blur between nightmares and real life,” she says. “I didn’t feel safe. I didn’t like the dark. The black dog was this strange, hazy but very calm memory. I remember growing up with this memory of a small shadow by the bed, with a sort of snout. It was darker than the dark. I saw it flitting about next to me, but I never felt like it was trying to get me or felt worried about what it was. It was strangely un-terrifying and un-traumatising for me…”

Bernholz's ghost dog wasn't really discussed until she was 12. The topic came up in conversation with her older brother, who had also spent time in the same room, and who had also seen the dog. Being four years older, his recollections were more vivid.

"It all came out that day," remembers Bernholz. "I suddenly made the connection with a faint, accepted memory that I hadn't questioned. There were many other things that happened in that house that were a bit more unsettling, but I didn't encounter those myself. I grew up hearing things. It was definitely a place with an energy that was a bit strange and odd. The memory of the house still haunts me. To this day, I dream about it. I find the idea of a house haunting you quite interesting. And also the way that we ourselves haunt a place with constant imaginings of it. A lot grew out of that… it triggered a lifetime fascination with ghosts."

The catalyst that inspired the grown-up Bernholz to make ghosts the subject of her new Gazelle Twin album occurred on the last night of 2019's 'Pastoral' tour. The venue for the gig was an old cinema in London's Walthamstow. As Bernholz entered the building for the performance, she recalls feeling a sudden change of atmosphere, something she'd experienced in a number of different places over the years. After that night on the 'Pastoral' tour, friends started randomly sharing ghost stories with her, and the concept of ghosts being the focus of her next record quickly manifested itself.

"Over time, the idea has become woven into my life and my experiences, in terms of the psychological and emotional place that I'm presently at," she explains. "I'm a parent now of two young boys and I had my second child in lockdown. With or without children, lockdown was really disruptive and emotional… really hard and upsetting and strange. That all knitted together with me constantly thinking about ghosts. When I make an album, I try and get as big a bowl of ingredients as I can. I spend a lot of time feeding on visuals and stories, reading books and watching films. I try to connect things up."

For Bernholz, it was the psychological slant found in many ghost stories that most caught her attention. She talks about how the phenomenon of poltergeist hauntings often happens in troubled households, or in houses with teenagers making the complicated transition to adulthood.

"I kept thinking about all these connections, and about how my own mental state was feeding into the idea of life being slightly more transient or nonlinear," she says. "I think I'm neurodivergent. In the last couple of years, I've started to really notice how that might be presenting itself, and how that might have presented itself throughout my life. In my experiences with depression over the years, I've often felt like I'm haunting a place, or that I'm a ghost, or that I'm not really here.

"After having children, I've gone through quite a big shift in my own sense of self, and my own mental health. Experiencing postnatal depression and just managing children has made me really aware of some of the emotional things connected to my own childhood."

'Black Dog' was a long time in the making – a lifetime, you could say. Elements from a childhood growing up in the 1980s haunt the 11 pieces that make up the album. Bernholz mentions Christopher Maynard's seminal Usborne book 'The Worlds Of The Unknown: Ghosts' (1977) and John Carpenter's 'Halloween' (1978) as formative influences on its visual and sonic framing, while the words and rhythmic meter of 'Funnybones', quoted earlier, weave their way through the title track.

'Funnybones' carries a significance that cuts across Bernholz's lifetime. She read the book as a child and now reads it to her sons, and ordinarily it has a levity and gleeful innocence. Used on the record, however, the Ahlbergs' words become savage and filled with fear. Instead of providing the context for a sweetly funny story about the bond between a parent and son, here they preface a tale of being paralysed and trapped by demons.

The opening track, 'I Disappear', sets the tone for the collection. Here we find Bernholz employing the ominous, low-pitched, growling voice that first emerged, unbidden, on one song on 'Unflesh', and which asserted itself fully on 'Pastoral'.

"I don't know where that came from," she admits. "I thought, 'OK, well, I'll just go with this', because it's quite a characterful, masculine voice in a way. I set it free on 'I Disappear' – I wanted to try and explore a bit more with it, and see where it goes. It terrifies me to be honest, but it feels great to push that voice out. Also, I don't get to be loud very often with kids around, and that voice comes with a different and greater volume."

Behind Bernholz's voice, 'I Disappear' is characterised by a collection of episodic sounds that give the piece the feel of a radio play – resonant bass drones, springy synth tones and a cloying denseness. The track focuses its attention on the line "Freedom is buried here", delivered with anguish, terror and a multitude of emotional inferences.

Many of the electronic sounds on the album were made in the summer of 2022, using the travelling Moog Sound Lab installed in the home of Bernholz's friend and collaborator Aaron Gilbert. Her goal, when working with vintage synthesisers like the Lab's rare EMS VCS 3, was to use them as sources for samples that would then be layered and turned into the murky and impenetrable sound worlds that exist behind Bernholz's vocals. They also provide the basis for clusters of tense, mysterious, unresolved yet purposeful melodies, very much a nod to 1980s horror movie scores.

"I really wanted that very specifically analogue electronic sound," she says. "It feels a bit wilder, and a bit more unpredictable. It's so much more imperfect than the sound you get from digital synths."

Elsewhere on the album, her friend Alexander Painter, who she founded the Anti-Ghost Moon Ray label with, played cello. This sound became thick, impenetrable drones, while Bernholz admits to sampling and reprocessing whole songs – to the point of being unrecognisable – as a foundation for the tracks. Voice samples and harsh vocal manipulations appear across the album, giving the pieces a vivid and spooky otherworldliness.

"I was trying to quite literally take the idea of haunting and ghosts into the production," she says. "There are samples, but there are also the processes I've gone through to try and create that ghost version of things. There are things that are sampled and then stretched and turned into shadows..."

One of the most uncharacteristic elements is the use of piano, which Bernholz has never explored before. Piano melodies appear prominently on two pieces – 'The Long Room' and 'A Door Opens' – but, in keeping with her natural inclination to alter sounds, they are both storied in their own unique way. For 'The Long Room', she used a recording her father made of her sister playing the family piano in the Kent farmhouse. The tape actually dates from before Bernholz was born.

"I found the process especially weird and ghostly," she says. "I was able to take samples of that piano and play it within the acoustics of my childhood home. It was so simple. I'm just using a sample, but the fact that I was able to go back to that place and tinker on the piano I remember playing with as a kid was quite amazing."

'A Door Opens' features a weathered sample of a chord sequence from Robert Schumann's 'Ghost Variations' for piano. Like all the pieces on 'Black Dog', it was completely improvised, and turned out to be one of the most emotional recordings that Bernholz made during the development of the album.

"I literally just hit record and started playing the Schumann chords and singing at the same time," she remembers. "It was very quick – I did that piece in about an hour. When I was in the middle of singing, I think one of the lines triggered something, and I thought, 'Oh, here we go. This is what this is. This is going to be an emotional one'. I don't write lyrics and then make a song about it. The lyrics always come while I'm recording. What they mean is something that's worked out later."

While she rarely leaves a sound untouched, Bernholz is generally much more hands-off with her vocals. She talks of leaving an unadulterated rawness, of deliberately avoiding correcting mistakes and allowing imperfections to stay resolutely where they are. They are the spectres of the recording process, captured forever in her songs like an early Thomas Edison attempt to listen in to the dead.

'Black Dog' is arguably the most complete Gazelle Twin work to date, because it's totally personal. Bernholz admits to being slightly nervous about it.

"There's always a fear that you've overindulged a little bit," she says. "The theme is a heavy one. It's located much more in a place of vulnerability than my previous albums. There's death. There are good memories in there. There's reverence. There's innocence and childhood. There are apologies. There are admissions. There's hope. There are moments of respite. There's resolution."

Bernholz pauses and takes a deep breath.

"On the whole, it's pretty overwhelming – even for me."

'Black Dog' is released by Invada on 27 October

SPATIAL DELIVERY

Spatial audio has revolutionised the listening experience for over half a century, but what of its creative possibilities? Composers Max Cooper, Kali Malone and NikNak reflect on the potential of 4DSOUND, which is hailed as the world's most advanced spatial audio sound system

WORDS: ANTON SPICE

In the words of modernist architect Le Corbusier, it promised to be "a work capable of profoundly affecting the human sensibility". Bringing together "electronics, sound, noise", this work would inhabit all corners of the structure built to house it. It was to be nothing less than "a new creation opening all before it".

That structure was the Philips Pavilion at the 1958 World's Fair, Brussels – an asbestos-coated concrete waveform made of nine hyperbolic paraboloids that seemed to burst out of the freshly tarmacked Belgian ground. Overseen by Iannis Xenakis, the work it enclosed was called 'Poème Électronique', an eight-minute piece by French composer Edgar Varèse, with grandiose names like 'Man-Made Gods' and 'How Time Moulds Civilization' accompanied by projections of light and colour.

Using a spatialised scheme devised by Varèse, it required many sound projectionists armed with rotary telephone dials to feed the music in and out of 400 speakers, sending squawks, honks and rumbles whizzing up and down the walls of the building. Le Corbusier was convinced it would change the world. Failing that, it would do a sterling job showing off advancements in Philips' audio technology. The piece has endured, but the building was torn down the following year.

There is no parable in opening with this story, but it does illustrate that artistic engagement with spatial audio is nothing new. From Renaissance chorales to Stockhausen's 'Helicopter String Quartet', surround sound to ambisonics, composers and designers have long tweaked the edges of modernity, experimenting and innovating with form to try and provide a more realistic, immersive or spectacular listening experience.

The latest addition to this canon is Amsterdam studio 4DSOUND. Built for a network of production studios and performance spaces, the 4DSOUND technology is part instrument, part sound system and part software, allowing composers to make sound objects that can be positioned and moved around a given space. Unlike many of its predecessors, the emphasis is as much on the creative potential for the composer as it is on the listener's experience.

In April and May this year, 4DSOUND hosted a series of performances, workshops and diffusions (where music is presented or "diffused" through the spatial system) at Stone Nest in London. The residency provided an opportunity to hear the technology up-close and also to speak to some of the musicians commissioned to make work for it. Each installation is site-specific, and each has its own sonic peculiarities.

Stone Nest is no different. Built in 1888 and located next to a fire station on Shaftesbury Avenue in the heart of London's West End, both the original Welsh Presbyterian church and Limelight nightclub that took its place in the 1980s made the most of its domed acoustics, heightening the sense of devotion and delirium that music could induce.

You could say that 4DSOUND's intention lies somewhere between the two. Not much separates its dark, cavernous interior from the bustle of a central London streetscape. Noise leaks through. Sometimes sirens merge with the music. And yet the experience of stepping from one world into another is profound.

The night I visited, US composer/synthesist Kali Malone was performing. The audience was seated in a circle around a central speaker the size of a small fire extinguisher. People fanned out around it like ripples in a pond.

Around them, 32 omnidirectional speakers, four subs and six additional PA speakers were positioned in the alcoves and up towards the dome in an equally spaced three-dimensional grid. Some poked out of the ground, while others hung like bats in the rafters. As nodes of sound, they are designed to be inconspicuous.

Kali Malone's work is perfect for spaces such as these. Her long-form drones and microtonal organ shifts seek out the material resonances of grand spaces. We were hearing 'Carved Windswept In Stone', a new composition made using 4DSOUND software, and an existing piece called 'Living Torch', originally commissioned for the loudspeaker orchestra, Acousmonium, about which we'll learn more a little later.

'Carved Windswept In Stone', Malone tells me, was inspired by the natural spatiality of the pipe organ and was constructed from up to 30 recordings of individual pipes, pitches and air pressures.

"What I wanted to do was create columns using the 4DSOUND software to resemble the pipe structure within the space," she explains. "I was also inspired by the forest and wind sounds occurring in nature, and so I took all these delicate air pressure recordings and spatialised them in the room as if it was a forest of pipes."

I'd been unaware of this at the time of the performance. As it began, I found myself working hard to locate the origins of the sound, to sense its spatial elements. I realised quickly, however, that this was somewhat easier said than done. With no focal point, I began to feel like I was no longer grounded in the physical space at all. I closed my eyes and let the sound wash over me instead.

"I think with 4DSOUND, what we do is create sound – it's not even spatial sound per se," says company co-founder, Poul Holleman, speaking from Amsterdam. "The magic of Kali Malone is that you are almost inside the organ. Her piece just exists in space. Sometimes it's this thick, dense fog that is just everywhere, and then suddenly there can be something high up in the ceiling."

As a form of playback technology, spatial audio has entered the lexicon of both consumer electronics and musical performance in recent years. A number of studios, venues and festivals now exist as outlets for it, from one-off performances to album playbacks. But Holleman is the first to admit that the term is a bit of a misnomer. Sound is inherently spatial.

"If you are in the street, at home, wherever you are, that's how sound propagates," he explains.

The devil, you could say, is in the diffusion.

Developments in sound reproduction have evolved in step with technology and, as such, early experiments in spatialising audio playback were largely channel-based by necessity. As in the Philips Pavilion, this was achieved by positioning speakers and routing audio to them, not unlike a telephone switchboard.

Perhaps the most obvious example is quadraphonics, which was generally considered the first consumer-ready foray into surround sound. However, the complexity of the set-up and a paucity of records to play on it proved to be stumbling blocks. New systems often need new formats to make them viable. When gramophones were first introduced to emerging markets, their makers had to send envoys to record enough local music to sell alongside them. The emphasis on creation is a key component of Holleman's project.

In that sense, 4DSOUND is perhaps closer in spirit to the one-off experiments pursued by avant-garde composers in the first half of the 20th century. Charles Ives positioned his orchestra members apart from one another to give a sense of distance in performance, as Renaissance composers had done with choirs hundreds of years before him.

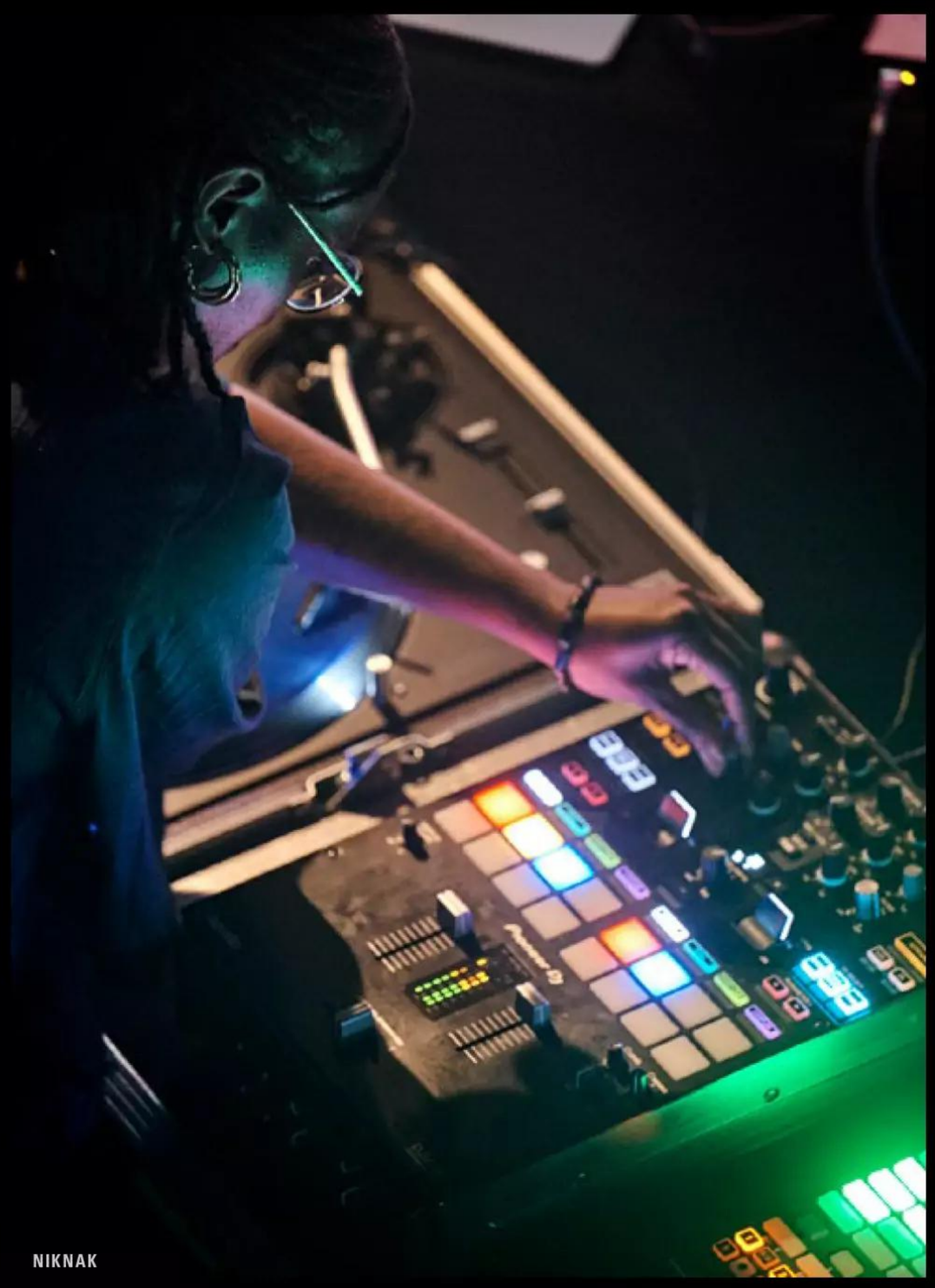
Karlheinz Stockhausen famously experimented with all manner of sonic manipulation. Meanwhile, Varèse, Xenakis and their contemporaries at the vanguard of musique concrète were revolutionising not only the classical form but laying the foundations for what we know today as electronic music.

The apotheosis of the channel-based era was the development of the Acousmonium by François Bayle at Pierre Schaeffer's Groupe De Recherches Musicales in 1974. Consisting of 80 speakers placed like sentinels on and around the stage, it required musicians to diffuse their works across the array in real time. "Another utopia, devoted to pure 'listening'… arranged with a view to immersion in sound, to spatialised polyphony," wrote Bayle in 1993.

The Acousmonium is an awesome sonic (and visual) experience, but it labours under the weight of claims such as Bayle's and remains in the rarefied corridors of experimental music. In the decades that followed, parallel technologies emerged, employing either "scene-based" audio, such as ambisonics, or the "object-based" audio of Dolby Atmos and ultimately 4DSOUND. These require a conceptual shift away from discrete channels and towards three-dimensional sound spaces, and have found their way into mainstream electronics and immersive cinema experiences.

"Dolby Atmos is the big player," Holleman says. "They bring object-based audio to the masses."

KALI MALONE



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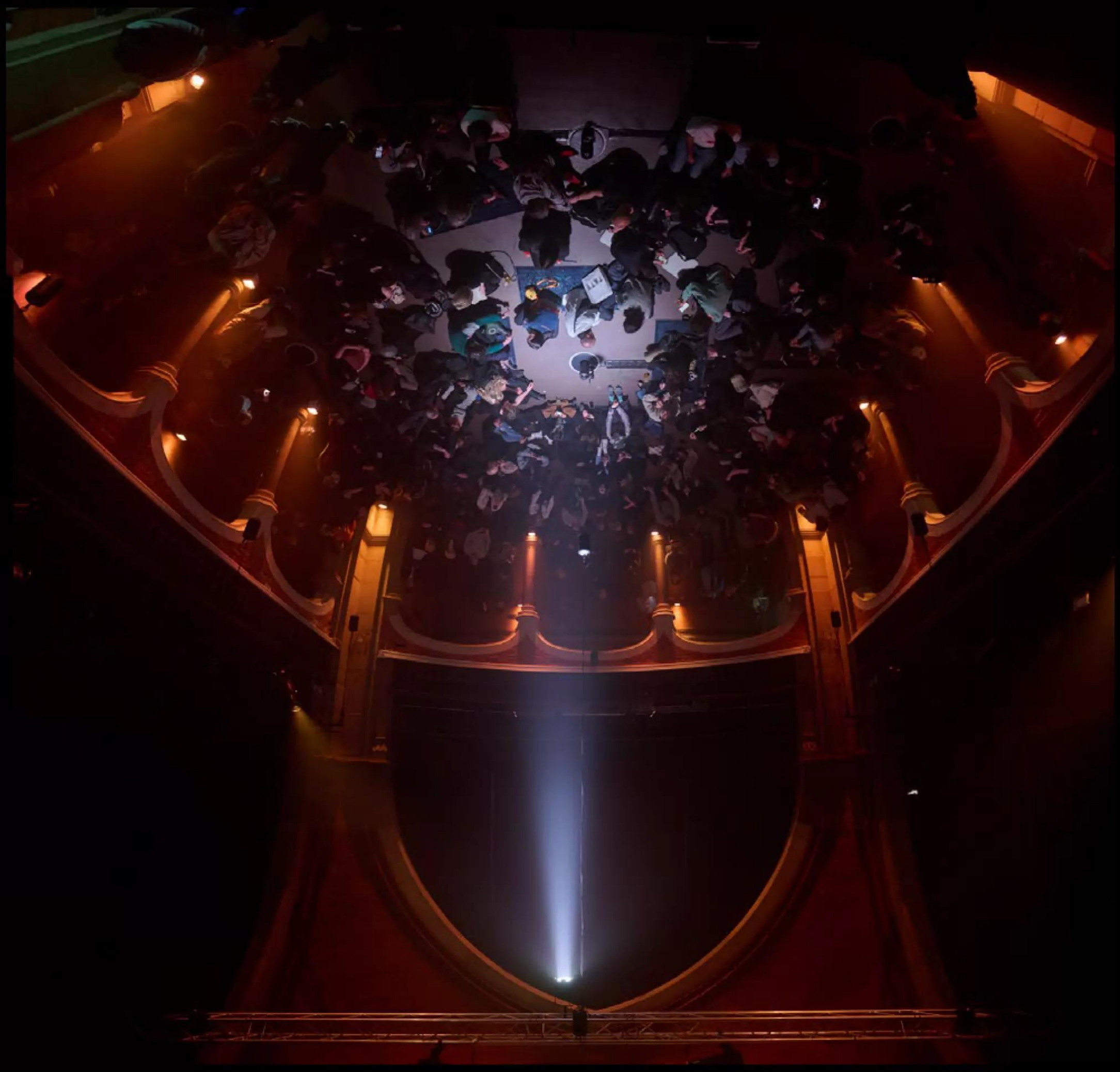


The technology is now embedded in your iPhone, but you may not even know it. In any case, this is not a space that 4DSOUND is interested in. Instead, it's pursuing the creative potential of spatial sound for the composer as much as the "pure listening" experience of the audience.

"When we started, we really designed 4DSOUND as an instrument for live performance," continues Holleman. "It's a hybrid between a system and an instrument, but we tend to say it's an instrument because it challenges you to dig in, to try stuff – it gives you something back. It's an expressive thing."

Premiering long-form work 'Eternities' at Stone Nest, Oram Award-winning composer and turntablist NikNak says that this approach has opened up the way she thinks about music making.

"Whenever I create something, I always have the possibility of it being made spatial in the back of my mind," she says. "And so to create something from the start that was always going to be presented in an immersive way was very refreshing."

It follows then that an awareness of physical space in composition can begin to shape how the music is conceived.

"I try to be careful not to overload the sonic space with sounds that maybe clash or might be too much all at once," she explains.

"The way that you interact with that software is extremely artistic, not purely technical," adds Malone.

The excitement for the composer is clear. For the listener, however, it demands a bifurcation of perspective. If 4DSOUND is both instrument and system, should we be listening to the music being played or the object playing it? A closer look at the technology itself offers some clarity. The omnidirectional speakers employed by 4DSOUND were developed by Leo De Klerk of Bloomline Acoustics, a maverick music technologist who passed away in 2020 having coined the term "the inaudible loudspeaker". Seeds of this idea go back over 100 years, to a time when transparency was considered more important than volume in sound reproduction.

"What directional speakers do is create an energy beam of sound," says Holleman, cupping his hands around his mouth to mimic the workings of a cone-based speaker.

"This distorts my voice."

He takes his hands away.

"It's different than when I do this."

That difference is audible, even through a laptop. As a window does with light, so should the speaker allow sound to pass through it without obstruction. Focus too intently on the windowpane and everything behind it begins to look a little blurry.

"The other thing is that when sound is omnidirectional, you can orientate yourself in relation to the speaker and it doesn't change," continues Holleman. "One thing I thought while listening to NikNak on our system was that this is what ambient should be. It exists in the space and it becomes more tangible."

Presenting two evenings of his MESH project at Stone Nest, producer Max Cooper has been working with 4DSOUND for over 10 years.

"Initially I was blown away by the extra immersion and power that music could take on in the spatial realm," he explains. "But over time, I've moved more towards, 'What meaningful human experience can I communicate to you via spatial sound, which I could not do otherwise?'."

The maturation of Cooper's work from spectacle to substance touches on something fundamental about this whole enterprise. It's impressive to hear techno glitches scatter around Stone Nest at warp speed, but the possibilities of spatial audio should be far greater than just sonic fireworks.

"So much of our awareness of our place in the world comes from spatial audio cues," continues Cooper. "But being visually dominated societies for the most part, I think we often aren't aware of the role of spatial sound in our experience of being. When we start to play with those cues in a musical context, it can create powerful, visceral experiences which can heighten art and the messages that can be communicated."

It was still light outside when I left Stone Nest, the sounds of central London as abrasive as they were when I went in. I wondered what this moment would have felt like for a visitor to 'Poème Électronique'. Like Le Corbusier and Varèse before them, 4DSOUND and the artists it commissions face a conundrum. How do you transform a specialised auditory experience into an enduring, paradigm-shifting technology? I ask Holleman what he hopes the impact will be.

"If you go to a documentary about vegetarianism, when you walk out of the cinema, you are very conscious of what your position is in the world regarding that subject. I think and I hope that when people leave a 4DSOUND concert, they have a heightened sensitivity to sound and realise that there is a lot to explore in everyday life."

In a context where opportunities for artists to innovate are scarce and the listening experience is compressed into oblivion, spatial audio is fighting the good fight, and there is no doubt that advancements in the technology are impressive. And yet it's hard to shake the feeling that the idiosyncrasies of spatial audio systems like 4DSOUND represent both possibility and limitation.

"I think its potential for the creative process and the sensorial process is magnificent," concludes Kali Malone. "But it's hard to put a finger on what that is yet because there's still so much space for it to grow."

As was the case in 1958, how it does so remains to be heard.

4DSOUND is actively involved in various creative spatial audio projects, collaborations and residencies. For more information, see 4dsound.net

DEEP CUTS

Eclectic and esoteric, pinging from Aphex-esque techno to Zapp-style funk, the debut solo record from former Sink Ya Teeth vocalist Maria Uzor is an irrepressible statement of intent

WORDS: OLI WARWICK
PICTURES: ANDI SAPEY

In the breakneck exchange of information, it's not easy to stay immune to influence. When I ask Maria Uzor about her creative process, she first suggests that many of her song ideas come from a blank slate, but quickly rethinks her position.

"Nothing is ever a blank slate, actually, because nothing ever exists on its own," she decides. "There's always an influence or something that sparked that first stage of creativity, whether you're aware of it or not. I've written a song when I heard a car alarm going off and just thought… 'Yeah!'."

Plenty of us can relate to the rhythmic spell of everyday sounds after a night in front of a sound system, and the kinetic electronics driving Uzor's music often give the impression she's a dyed-in-the-wool raver. There's a gnarly flair to the synths and a sharp angle to her beats that could easily be floating between the trees at a free party in Thetford Forest, down the road from her home city of Norwich. Appearances, of course, can be deceptive.

"No, no, I'm not actually a raver at all," she clarifies. "People have often said that my music is very rave-influenced. Maybe it's just in my blood, or from another life."

The techno and electro qualities in Uzor's debut solo album 'Soft Cuts' are guided less by savvy formula and much more by creative instinct. Strident beats have been a driving force in her music for a long time, but she's used them as a medium for the stories she wants to tell rather than pursuing the expectations of the dancefloor.

"It has always been about writing songs," Uzor confirms. "I think in terms of landscapes, soundscapes… that's why I find it hard to stick to any particular genre, because I'm not writing for a genre – I'm writing for what I want to paint."

Before signing to independent electronic label Castles In Space for 'Soft Cuts', Uzor released her solo EPs and output from her earlier band project Sink Ya Teeth on her own Hey Buffalo label. Her approach has been resolutely DIY – making her own artwork, editing her own videos and learning music production her own way.

As a result, the new record reflects the sound of an artist operating on their own terms because they've never had to answer to anyone else, echoing the freewheeling energy of 1990s electronica before stylistic boundaries became established. Uzor's approach brings to mind electronic misfits like Nicolette, whose distinctive jazz singing style collided with productions from Shut Up & Dance, Plaid, Dego and Alec Empire, resulting in records which stand out from the glut of the era as truly remarkable anomalies.

Digging into Uzor's background, it makes perfect sense that she started out in a punk band where there were "no rules apart from being loud and expressive". You can discern that confrontational quality in her approach to performance, where her voice can snarl with the best of them in contrast to her sweeter, more soulful croon. Equally, the architecture of her music embraces risk and chance, pulling sharp handbrake turns and shirking verse-chorus linearity in favour of something more surprising.

"Creating unexpected twists and turns in music really excites me," Uzor says. "Taking music where you wouldn't necessarily think it would go – for me, that's what songwriting is. It's all about the exploration, searching for answers, trying to pick a sound out of the ether and bring it into existence."

From the fluttering synth bath of the opening track, 'From The Silence', to the ensemble of processed voices weaving around a sludgy bassline on 'Prophylactics For Pterodactyls', 'Soft Cuts' shows Uzor operating freely and according to her own whims.

The album, and her preceding solo singles, all came out of the forced reset brought about by lockdown, although you'd never dream of calling 'Soft Cuts' a lockdown album – it's nowhere near ambient enough, for a start.

Before the pandemic, Uzor was full-throttle on Sink Ya Teeth with bassist Gemma Cullingford, and a live review from a show in Manchester on 12 March 2020 captures the final appearance of the band as the world was crumbling and the future of live music seemed uncertain.

"Sink Ya Teeth look and sound like they've tumbled through a wormhole from early 80s New York, recalling the punk-funk of no-wave artists such as ESG and Liquid Liquid," wrote NME's Gary Ryan. "Uzor's vocal… sounds like Grace Jones surveying a party from the comfort of a chaise longue."

Sink Ya Teeth were more directly pointed toward the hybridised dance/band tradition – it's telling that Uzor has also guested on tracks from crossover heavyweights A Certain Ratio and !!! – and the duo's upwards trajectory in the wake of their second album was heralding big things. But Uzor is positive about the interference of the pandemic as an opportunity for her to re-evaluate, and the solo work she's released over the past few years is testament to the comfortable place she now finds herself in musically.

'Soft Cuts' was a new experience for Uzor in writing an album as a conscious, cohesive project.

"I got my whiteboard out and printed some pictures off the internet, and I created a mood board of this world I wanted the album to exist in. From there it became quite easy to build the tracks. I wanted to create something that was connected from start to finish. Going on that journey most humans find themselves on, where you're born and everything's great and then things occur, some things go wrong and you enter a period of darkness. From this period of darkness, you get a greater understanding of yourself and you enter a place of light."

As in life, nothing is one-dimensional in Uzor's music, and so even the lighter moments might pivot into darkness, or a creeping, shadowy passage might be shot through with shards of gleaming, joyous melody.

'Silver Moon' is a standout track which captures the essence of Uzor's unique appeal. It might only be four minutes long, but it covers a lot of ground in that time. The starry-eyed wooze of the synths and repitched P-Funk vocals on the lead-in all conjure a sense of the Afrofuturist hopes and dreams of Underground Resistance, 4hero and so many other pioneering black artists. There's also space for a rugged segue into moodier territory informed by footwork, bass music and outright experimentation, cutting up between grittiness and synthetic beauty with flair and raw expression.

"There's definitely a footwork influence in 'Silver Moon'," Uzor admits. "And I have always been fascinated by things relating to Afrofuturism and space. I think lyrically, in terms of the journey of the album, that song's right in the middle. It's the moment of being aware there is hope and that somewhere, there's something else. It's opening up, but there's still a darkness that hasn't quite been let go of yet."

'Facemask' serves as a perfect counterpoint to the exuberance of 'Silver Moon', turning inward for the most intimate track on 'Soft Cuts'. It would be a stretch to call it a ballad, but rather it hints at the ethereal chill of Cocteau Twins, Siouxsie Sioux and This Mortal Coil, with modern electronics standing in for washed-out goth guitars.

Uzor's self-taught approach to music comes through in the unusual harmonic interplay between her layers of voice, the pulse of the synths and the icy string samples, teetering just outside the conventions of Western composition and baiting dissonance to land a powerful emotional punch.

"I've never had training," Uzor says when I ask her about the cryptic approach to the track's melodic make-up. "It's just the fun of feeling out where a track wants to go. The more I'm getting to know Ableton, the more I can hear a sound in my head and create it."

Still, the primary feature of her creative process remains one of intuition and curiosity. She works in the box out of necessity and convenience, digging into the sounds within reach and seeing how she can bend them to her will, or how she can respond to what her experimentation provides.

"I'll open up my laptop and find an instrument or synth I haven't used or don't particularly like the sound of and just play around," Uzor explains. "I'll chop up little sections, reverse things, put some random effects on it and build from there. That's when you can hear, you know, 'This needs a high frequency here, this needs something on the offbeat and this needs some bottom end'. Then I'm sculpting something to create a balanced sound."

One trap with digitally created music has been its tendency towards sterile precision – all beats perfectly gridded out, all frequencies chiselled into their chosen range. Uzor's music hums with imperfection, whether it's the previously mentioned harmonic dissonance or a touch of red-line distortion on the kick, a little murkiness around a pad tone – and therein lies the charm.

There's a visceral vitality to the sound which you wouldn't immediately associate with music made in isolation during long sessions interfacing with a laptop screen. These days, there are plenty of ways to stop any sound feeling too "digital". For Uzor, though, it's not a conceited move towards vogue-ish lo-fi, but rather a natural by-product of the process.

"I don't think it's about consciously looking for the imperfections," she muses. "I think it's about consciously trying to keep hold of my own humanity within the music, if that makes sense. You're creating something with the machine, but you're thinking, 'How can I still make it feel like a part of me?'."

"I talk in possibilities, you talk in absolutes," Uzor sings on 'Sometimes They Look At You', the penultimate track and second single from 'Soft Cuts'. Channelling, in the opening stretch, some of the fierce and flamboyant brilliance of Lola Olafisoye from mutant disco millennial group Spektrum, it's another showcase for the different guises her voice can adopt.

The hook for 'Sometimes They Look At You' frames a gap in understanding between people, but it's also a useful indication of Uzor's mentality towards life and creativity. The track itself, the album overall, and indeed her whole career, all thrive on possibilities. While she may still be considered an emergent artist in superficial industry terms, the various threads of Uzor's output to date are the work of someone seizing opportunities to express themselves no matter what. Her self-reliant approach prizes the art above all else.

"I've written an album for myself, that makes me happy," she explains. "Through doing that, I've safeguarded myself from external critique to a certain extent, because as long as I'm happy with it, then other people's opinions matter less. If I tried to write some dance track about shaking my ass in the club or something and it wasn't well-received, that would probably affect me more because it wasn't my authentic voice.

"'Your approval is not crucial'," she adds with a laugh, quoting herself from the final track on 'Soft Cuts'.

It makes sense, then, that Uzor exists outside the cut and thrust of any given scene. Before anything is released, she only gets feedback on her music from her partner who isn't even a musician himself.

"I stay within my own orbit," she admits.

All of which feeds into the highly distinctive, experimental quality of her music, guided with creative conviction and not desperately holding on for validation. In the ever-prevalent vacuity of image-led self-promotion and style over substance, the real ones stand out, and Maria Uzor is absolutely one of the real ones.

'Soft Cuts' is out now on Castles In Space

Equal parts euphoria, beauty and tragedy, Fantastic Twins' 'Two Is Not A Number' is an astonishing and ambitious concept album that explores the lives and trajectories of imaginary twins. Eerie, uneasy and swirling with atmospheric darkwave/synthpop hues, prepare to step into its enticingly dreamlike world

WORDS: NEIL KULKARNI
PICTURES: KASIA ZACHARKO

DUAL PURPOSE

FANTASTIC TWINS

Let's start at the end. Me and Julienne Dessagne (aka Fantastic Twins) are wrapping up our conversation about her new record 'Two Is Not A Number', and I'm asking the French producer if I'm wrong to pick up on something truly remarkable in its hugely moving closing track, 'All Of This Is Resolved'.

I hear all the things – the dazzling sonic innovation, the hypnotic repetition and the wholly unique sense of compositional musical structure – that have made 'Two Is Not A Number' such a stunning record up to that point. But crucially, I also hear, if not redemption, then something approaching hope. And in 2023, that's a rare groove indeed, especially when it's not a self-help sentiment but something that's arrived at through toughness, discipline and a ruthless concision. But there it is, undeniable. Hope. Glimmering through the murk and darkness.

"Hopeful because it's a question mark," says Dessagne. "I knew from the beginning when I made the track, that it was going to be the last track. When I was making it, I was thinking, 'I gave myself this story with the twins, and it's about their lives. I've been working around this twins concept for a while. I have this feeling that it is over now, and have I said everything? Are these twins dead? They are dead'.

"I was going through a whole existential thing myself about what I have to say as an artist. Does it end there? When I was singing these vocals, it was an extreme emotion, moments where I'm actually almost crying. And I kept those moments because there was this really essential question of, 'Yeah, we're gonna die', you know? The lyrics, 'Gonna take you home with me' – for many people, home can be a different thing, but for me it's taking you somewhere you can find peace and hope. I only found that through intense drama."

I like the fact the lyrics manage to talk about polarities and complexities but without judgement, without having to have the final word.

"Exactly," agrees Dessagne. "And without the incentive of, 'This is where you should go, this is what you should do'. I had the feeling with 'All Of This Is Resolved' that I was coming home to something essential that I have, that's incredibly hard to get out of myself. My trajectory throughout this record was… tormented."

As a listener, your trajectory through 'Two Is Not A Number' (released on Dessagne's new House Of Slessor label) will be emphatically one of delight, not torment. It's one of this year's most startling, deeply rewarding, yet instantly addictive transmissions.

The album chronicles a pair of imaginary twins from their birth, through life and to their death in a series of utterly enrapturing, danceable experiments in electronic sound. The conceptual basis of 'Two Is Not A Number' isn't just a postoperative explanation of the piece. The twin idea – the idea of dualities, of multiplicities and how they contradict the false adversarial oppositions of our consciousness and lives – threads itself deep into what you hear and the words Dessagne sings and intones.

Born in Saint-Étienne, Dessagne was a contemporary ballet dancer for 20 years. Having studied political sciences at Sciences Po in France, she then undertook an additional master's degree in European Cultural Policies at Glasgow University. It was here, at the Optimo Espacio nights every Sunday at Sub Club, that she had an epiphany, propelling her into electronic dance music.

The intriguing mix of theory and praxis that's characterised all her solo and remix work up to now still feeds into the miraculous balance between the head and the body in the music she makes as Fantastic Twins. New tracks like 'Land Of Pleasure Hi Fi' are full of information for the head, but also information for the body, for the butt. They have that crucial electronic physicality that is simultaneous with the head-wrecking aspects.

"Oh, 100 per cent," says Dessagne. "When I started making music, it quickly became clear I had this need of something charismatic in the tracks. There has to be something that catches my attention – in my ears and brain, but also physically. I think it goes back to Optimo, and my first experience of classical and contemporary music being through dancing at a very intensive level.

"I have this visceral bond to the music and something has to happen where I can't control it with my mind. Your brain can go in so many directions, but with the body – and the feeling of sound as a weight in your body – this gives me reassurance. There has to be more than just an intellectual appreciation."

2017's 'The New You' EP and 'Obakodomo' album, as well as 2019's incredible 'Lost In Germany' EP, all suggest that Fantastic Twins, in coming to electronic music from the unique perspective of contemporary avant-garde composition and dance, was a place in which Dessagne could fully explore her nonconformist ideas around sound. It's the fluidity of that simultaneous brain/booty fix that in lots of ways erases your expectations of separation and hierarchy throughout 'Two Is Not A Number'.

What you hear on the likes of the remarkable 'Sisters At Odds' is an immediate unconventionality of structure, but also a dissidence to sonic hierarchy. It's as if everything is moveable, and rather than tiers of sound which settle into conventional places, the music is composed of layers that shift tectonically over each other, playing with the assumptions of the listener. It's truly electrifying.

"When I perform, I only play live – I don't play DJ sets, and what you're talking about stems from actually not really knowing what the structure of a track should be," grins Dessagne. "A DJ is attentive to what 'should' be happening. I don't have that. Live, I might compromise a little more on giving people what they expect but when producing in the studio, I really don't care. There is a narrative to the LP but within each track I don't need that narrative being over-weighted – I need flow…"

You need tracks to get to this kind of poised, mesmeric space where they can just hang?

"Yeah, exactly. There's a lot of reward for the listener in realising that the moment they expected didn't happen where they felt it *should* have happened. There's a flow – and it's not always obvious."

'Two Is Not A Number' was created during the long period of enforced isolation and lockdown in the pandemic. Dessagne uses scrapbooks of artwork, images, photography and quotes in her research towards new creative ideas, and absorbs late-night YouTube rabbit-holes into her process. 2016's mind-frazzling 'Bight Of The Twin' documentary – in which Genesis P-Orridge and filmmaker Hazel Hill McCarthy journey to Ouidah in Benin to explore the origins of the Vodoun religion – was particularly inspirational to 'Two Is Not A Number'.

"The book where I collect this stuff goes in every direction," explains Dessagne. "From something I saw on my plate in a restaurant, to the streets, to the museum. During the period when I was making this record, I was very depressed, feeling it was not moving forward quickly enough. Then I dived into the depths of YouTube and found that hugely over-dramatic documentary that made me laugh. But I came back in the studio the next day with the sense of intense tragedy that really helped me to create music."

Although she's making music that hits you with the immediacy of great pop, Dessagne never approaches music from a pop perspective – and the loose structures, the refusal to slip into the usual verse-chorus schematic puts every element in a thrilling, free-wheeling place. Particularly fascinating is how vocals fit into her music – the habits of pop, and perhaps our habit as listeners, is to foreground voices, to see them somehow as something pure, held up by the music.

But in Fantastic Twins, voices are another malleable instrument that can offer both tenderness and coldness. Dessagne breaks her voice into shards, scattering it carefully amid the other elements to contribute rhythmically to the groove, but also to the melodic detail – a production style that enables her to step between personas, to evanesce her ego. I've not heard vocals like it anywhere else this year.

"I'm *not* a vocalist," stresses Dessagne. "And I found with this record that the more words I wrote, the more that universality and impact became lost. I also really got to know my own voice. I used to add loads of operatic effects to my voice using a preset and I was always terrified that, 'If this machine breaks, what happens?'.

"So, before it broke, I put it away and started exploring all the things I can sonically do with my voice – the layers I can create, the sense of depth, the intensity. I need to feel that my voice is coming from deep down – underneath the ocean, from the sky or something very upfront. I try to give these vocals the exact treatment they should have to create these kinds of mental effects."

"Mental effects" is exactly it. There's a deeply lysergic, almost scary feel to this music that completely immerses you every step of the way because you never feel pushed or bullied by an ego. Dessagne's work isn't remotely a process of traditional artistic indulgence but an endless and deeply emotional tightrope walk between sonic playfulness and conceptual discipline.

So how does Julienne Dessagne know when a Fantastic Twins track is done? Does she need a deadline to work?

"I find it extremely difficult to decide when it's finished," she sighs. "You get nervous. You need outside ears. It was heartbreaking to consider it finished because I really enjoyed the phase of researching and composing, when you're taking a risk and you don't know where you're going. That's a very comfortable bubble for me as a producer, this time of creating when I don't have to share it with the world. It connects with the feel of twins in the womb, and that combination of trauma and comfort is linked with both creating and letting your creation be heard out in the world.

"I don't really decide when it's finished – the track decides. When I make a soundtrack or a remix, there's a clear remit and constant collaboration – but this record was a blank page and down to me. There are days when nothing happens. Then there's that day where you feel an emotion, and you feel you're touching something that is worth keeping or exploring."

During the making of 'Two Is Not A Number', was Dessagne thinking about how in hell she was going to be able to play it live?

"No," she replies. "Live, I tend to strip things down and simplify a lot, getting rid of subtleties. When I made the record, I imagined people listening with headphones, hearing so many more details than when you are in a room full of others and you just want to dance.

"This is an old-school record, in that you listen on a personal and intimate level, but live I have to give myself some freedom. Every time I try to create something I can reproduce live, it loses spontaneity and intensity. I think this is always somehow consciously in the back of my mind when I make music in the studio, but on this record I freed myself from that idea."

The pull between creative freedom and creative anxiety is what characterises 'Two Is Not A Number' and makes it an astonishingly apposite album. It takes all the binaries we've been tutored in throughout our whole lives – others and ourselves, creation and destruction, life and death – and suggests a complexity of mutual dependence and simultaneity that's absolutely mind-blowing.

Let 'Two Is Not A Number' under your skin. Without judgement. Without a final word. It won't leave.

'Two Is Not A Number' is out now on House Of Slessor

IN GOOD SHAPE

Blurring the lines between future-facing electronics and “organic” percussion, American producer Jlin returns with her third long-player, ‘Perspective’ – a beguilingly tactile post-footwork gem

WORDS: STEPHEN DALTON
PICTURE: JOHN HULL

Faster than the speed of thought, Jlin has no time for labels. Her meticulously crafted brand of artisan electronica has an alien, shapeshifting beauty, gleaming and sleek, crystalline and futuristic. Feted by famous fans like Aphex Twin, 36-year-old Jerrilynn Patton has collaborated with revered experimental composers like Holly Herndon and William Basinski, plus cutting-edge choreographers and avant-classical ensembles. Equally at home in a club, a concert hall or a modern art gallery, she has always resisted reductive genre categories, in both her work and life.

“I don’t care about any of that, I just want to create,” she says, speaking from her home in the American Midwest. “That’s it. Ha!”

Jlin’s latest album, ‘Perspective’, is the electronic cousin of the 2020 performance piece of the same name, which she was commissioned to write for Chicago ensemble Third Coast Percussion. The project began with source recordings she made at the group’s studio, sampling the sounds of marimba, xylophone, vibraphone, ankle bells, wood blocks and more. She recalls this rich sonic treasure chest with a wistful sigh.

“I went there for one or two days in a row, for eight to 12 hours,” she says. “But even if you were there for a week, you couldn’t record everything.”

‘Perspective’ is the latest addition to Jlin’s growing canon of genre-blurring forays into the classical and orchestral world. In 2017, London-based Royal Ballet choreographer Wayne McGregor commissioned her to soundtrack his highly personal, globally acclaimed dance piece ‘Autobiography’, with the album version following in 2018.

“Wayne was one of the people who helped me change how I approach music,” she reveals. “His was the first full company that I worked with. He is just such a gem of a person. He trusted me with something that was very intimate, which is entirely based on his DNA and his existence.”

Last year, Jlin deconstructed and re-scored Mozart’s ‘Requiem In D Minor’ for Kyle Abraham’s New York dance troupe AIM, which earned rave reviews worldwide.

“Music and dance are one and the same for me,” she says. “A choreographer or dancer’s body can tell me what to write. I can read the movement. For example, one of my greatest inspirations, when it comes to choreography and the way she moves, is Eartha Kitt. How I create percussion and rhythm, how I make it flow, the fluidity of it – a lot of that has to do with her.”

Jlin was born and raised in Gary, Indiana, a once-booming steel town south of Chicago that has long been in post-industrial decline. Her parents were not musicians, but they were music lovers with broad tastes in jazz, pop and soul. She grew up listening to Sade – her favourite artist – alongside Luther Vandross and Phoebe Snow, Miles Davis and John Coltrane, Tito Puente and Elton John. The family house had a large back garden, and would sometimes host shows by local bands.

Before Jlin, Gary’s most famous musical exports were Michael Jackson and his family. Indeed, former Jackson 5 drummer Johnny Jackson lived in the same neighbourhood, and gave shy teenage maths-geek Jerrilynn her first music lessons.

“Johnny literally gave me my first pair of drumsticks,” she nods.

Later, while studying maths and architectural engineering at Indiana’s world-renowned Purdue University, Jlin graduated

from live drumming to electronic composing after discovering the digital workstation FL Studio. Her early tracks were largely inspired by Chicago's semi-underground footwork scene of the late 1990s and early 2000s, a rapid-fire variant of ghetto house with its own ultra-nimble, hyper-athletic dance styles.

She was too young and too far away to fully immerse herself in the scene, but one of its key pioneers, RP Boo – DJ/producer Kavain Wayne Space – became an early mentor.

"It was something I listened to every day, all day long," Jlin recalls. "I was just fascinated with the sound. I still am. Some tracks I hear, I'm still fascinated with the approach."

It was Jlin's footwork connections that alerted her to Planet Mu label boss Mike Paradinas, aka veteran British electronic composer µ-Ziq, who included her on his excellent 'Bangs & Works Vol 2: The Best Of Chicago Footwork' compilation in 2011. That in turn led to fashion designer Rick Owens hearing Jlin's 'Erotic Heat' track, and commissioning an extended remix version for his catwalk show.

Even with a growing profile in music and fashion circles, Jlin smartly held onto her well-paid job as a tractor driver for US Steel. But one Monday morning in 2014, after rushing back to the steel mill direct from attending Paris Fashion Week, she finally resolved to quit the nine-to-five and embrace a precarious full-time music career. She finally left just as her debut album, 'Dark Energy', came out on Planet Mu in 2015.

"Some people thought I was crazy to leave," she recalls. "I was making money. I had no kids. Nothing! They were like, 'Whaaat?'."

Jlin rarely talks about her personal life, but she casually mentions her sexuality during our interview. As a queer black woman in a musical field mostly dominated by straight white men, she is wary of fitting into some ready-made, simplistic, easily marketable backstory. For that reason, she has always resisted her work being framed though an overly autobiographical lens, her complex identity being reduced to a box-ticking diversity exercise.

"It's very much a pigeonhole," she nods. "God knows I've had my share of that, and I've had to turn shows down when I realised a person has put me in a slot because they are like, 'OK, we've covered our bases, you're black and you're a woman in a line-up full of white dudes…'. Ha!"

That said, Jlin has no particular objections about celebrating her blackness.

"Too many of us have gotten overlooked," she says. "So please see my colour. I'm standing on the shoulders of too many to ignore that. There's no way I could do that, it would be so disrespectful. My ancestors would roll over… I'd be in big trouble! Ha!

"But as far as my gender and my sexuality? No. What I don't want is this narrative of seeming like I'm capitalising off the fact of being a woman, or being a homosexual woman, in any way. I want my work to just speak for itself."

Almost a decade has passed since Jlin quit her US Steel job to make adventurous, futuristic, arrestingly beautiful music full-time. Following a financially dry spell during the pandemic, when she moved back into the family home in Gary, she now has her own place in nearby Merrillville, a blossoming career and huge critical respect. Does she ever miss that steel mill?

"Oh hell, yes!" she laughs. "Do you know why? Because I'm actually a routine person. I miss getting up. Sometimes I drive past there and I get a little sad. I'm like, 'Damn!'. Just for one day, I would love to go back and work there. Seriously!"

Fame is a fickle mistress, Jlin. Be careful what you wish for.

"I know," she grins. "That's why I said, 'Just one day'. Ha!"

'Perspective' is out now on Planet Mu

RIOT SQUAD

A rousing mid-point between punk and rave, the sound of LA underground trio Sextile is couched in exhilarating squall, dirty electro and Prodigy-shaped breaks

WORDS: NEIL KULKARNI

A band who meet in rehab are going to *have* to replace those addictions with something else. Now based in LA, NYC's post-punk electronic hooligans, Sextile, seek the serotonin high of music at its most exciting. And that's what you can hear throughout 'Push', their third full-length album and perhaps one of the most instantly compulsive, hugely danceable sonic fixes you'll score this year. It's the kind of record so illicitly thrilling, so ecstatically deranged, you want to slip it under your tongue.

Sextile's Brady Keehn and Melissa Scaduto, who both play in and front the band, as well as guitarist Cameron Michel, are all on that wonderful pre-release precipice of excitement – that moment where a band realise they are going to hear their music out in the world.

"I feel like everything's percolating nicely," grins Keehn. "I'm just about to explode a little bit. This sound is something new for us. Very different, addictive – we're feeding you exactly what we've always wanted to hear. So we're anxious and kind of boiling over because this music is designed for dancing, and that's what we want to see."

"A combination of excited and nervous," adds Scaduto. "I think it's a real departure from things we've done before, so there's a bit of nervousness with that. It's hard to have perspective when you listen to something so many times, but I'm more proud of it than anything we've done, and I'm excited to hear it hopefully go beyond just college radio."

College radio might have suited Sextile's music up to this point – check the potent punk/funk riots of 2015's 'A Thousand Hands' and 2017's 'Albeit Living' for a flavour – but it's the increasing EBM-ness of 2018's '3' EP that indicates the trajectory the new album fully fleshes out. 'Push' is a cut above everything Sextile have done so far. There's a finesse and fury to new tracks like 'Lost Myself Again' and 'Contortion' that you want to hear booming from passing cars, bumping out of shops and hotstepped to loud-as-hell in a giant field.

For this old fart, 'Push' recalls the best of 1980s and 90s underground dance music – everything from Meat Beat Manifesto, Front 242 and Jeff Mills to Dillinja, Pitchshifter and V Recordings. Crucially, though, it never sounds retrograde. It sounds like it's crushing its dance and rock 'n' roll influences together to make a whole new high.

"I don't think we ever think about how it's marketed or sold, so it's interesting you talk about where it could be heard," says Keehn. "For us, we never want to be stuck in the same thing, and what we're all obsessed with is that moment in the late 80s and early 90s where the idea of a 'rock god' was something that had been moved away from.

"The key question throughout making 'Push' was, 'Can you dance to this?'. When I think about that kind of Haçienda '89 vibe, it was less traditional rock and more the idea of a community around electronic music, where you'd gather to dance and experience the music rather than worship people on stage. Everybody is a part of the show. That's the feel we love."

Crucially, beyond the Stooges-meets-Prodigy rush of the sound, 'Push' is a revealing record, deeply connected with the personae and places involved. 'Crassy Mel' takes you from the rush and surge of a city street to a field in the middle of nowhere, replete with huge, trancey, mid-song pressure-drop, while the stunning highlight 'Crash' is like a dawn ride back from the party to some permanently distorted reality.

Running through every minute of this music is an unnerving sense that Sextile are buzzing right at the edges of the comedown, smeared neon and itchy eyeballs accompanying that simultaneous feeling of being in the place to be, but also feeling strung-out, dislocated and lost – a New York street-level toughness jostling for space with a West Coast trippiness that you want to slather your gums with.

It's these dualities, the toughness *and* the tenderness, the danceability *and* the dreaminess, that makes 'Push' such a compelling record.

"Absolutely. This record reflects our personalities the most," nods Keehn. "It captures where we are today. A lot of these songs were written within the past few months, where usually it takes us a year to create a record. That immediacy of recording was really important."

"Although there's no typical process," insists Scaduto. "We go from vibes, notes from conversations, random ideas, boards where Brady will write things like 'Beastie Boys' or 'Glitter Band drums' or 'Happy Mondays', and things emerge organically from those kinds of random points.

"It's funny that you mention The Stooges… there are two specific Stooges references on this record, because for me they embody this sexy dance feeling that a lot of bands just don't have. The first time I heard them, I felt this inclination to rip my skin off! For a guitar band, they are one of the sexiest there ever was."

"And the vibe of the tracks, because we recorded them so quickly, reflects how those songs came together," chips in Keehn. "'Crash' was a real Monday morning, outsider, overcast type of feel. It might have been around six or seven in the morning, playing with my vintage MS-series synths, and I find this detuned sound where only certain notes fit and work. The sounds came, the words came, I was struggling with the chorus… Then Melissa suggested that our friend Izzy Glaudini could help and the next day she'd recorded this perfect vocal combination.

"The whole song is not in a key, it's all slightly out of it, so playing it live is going to be pretty wild. That's what we're exploring at the moment – how to play these songs live in a way that doesn't get too slick, but allows us total manipulation of the sound."

That duality again, between wildness and discipline – it's made 'Push' one of 2023's most utterly compelling releases. Get hooked on it immediately and brace yourself for Sextile happening near you soon.

'Push' is out now on Sacred Bones

ROOT MANOEUVRES

AHO SSAN

Rhizomes

OTHER PEOPLE

Parisian electronic musician Niamké Désiré never got to meet his grandfather Mensah Antony, a trumpet player and renowned figure of the Ivory Coast music scene in the 1950s. He's also never been able to track down any recordings that might exist from his grandfather's musical career. Despite this, on his debut album as Aho Ssan – 2020's thunderous, twisting 'Simulacrum' – Désiré found a way to simulate his heritage by dreaming up The Mensah Imaginary Band. This synthetic ensemble was named in honour of his grandfather and created by the artist using Max software objects and patch cables. Talent clearly runs in the family.

'Simulacrum' situated Aho Ssan somewhere in the realm of other hard-edged experimental producers like Tim Hecker, Ben Frost or Slikback. His sonic language is uniquely his own though, and on his debut album, he applied it to questions of equality, identity and lived experience of racism and discrimination while growing up in the French suburbs.

A collaborative LP, 'Limen', then followed in 2022 with fellow sound explorer KMRU (the moniker of Kenyan ambient producer Joseph Kamaru). It's a record that skilfully balances Kamaru's gentler tones with Ssan's trademark, all-encompassing blasts of noise.

Now, on his electrifying second solo album 'Rhizomes', Ssan again reimagines how collaboration might look and sound, though this time he's joined not by an imaginary band, but by a real flesh-and-blood crew. And what a cast it is too. With the likes of Nicolás Jaar, Moor Mother, Valentina Magaletti, Blackhaine, Angel Bat Dawid and many others on board, 'Rhizomes' presents a who's who of forward-thinking names in experimental electronic music.

In fact, there's only one track on 'Rhizomes' where Ssan appears solo. 'Tetsuo II' is a writhing, complex arrangement of dark IDM electronica, moving like a hyperreal creature driven by a pulse of fractured beats. It's the kind of sound design that has you scratching your head in amazement, wondering just how he constructs this stuff. Across the album, these immersive and imposing soundscapes are fertile soil from which fascinating musical conversations burst into life.

One particularly arresting dialogue is between Ssan and the Lancashire rapper and musician, Blackhaine. On 'Cold Summer Part I', Blackhaine's vocal intensity is barely contained, rising with increasing agitation over shuddering sub-bass and shattered electronics. The song waxes and wanes like a boxer in the ring, constantly drawing on hidden energy reserves.

Then there's 'Till The Sun Down', featuring American hip hop group, Clipping and Polish cellist/composer Resina. It's a maze of distortion and unspooling industrial-strength trap, with Resina's instrument treated and transformed beyond recognition, as the ominous lyrics, "Why you pull the gun out / Run away, run away", cut through the haze. Ever-so-slightly less severe is 'Away', a composition that creeps and contorts, egged-on by French/Moroccan vocalist Exzald S and Italian percussionist Valentina Magaletti. 'Tetsuo I', featuring Emptyset's James Ginzburg, begins in a fit of acoustic-sounding scrapes, before fizzing electronics and plaintive keys take over.

Other People label-founder Nicolás Jaar appears on 'Le Tremblement', a brief, somewhat mournful piece that almost sounds like two separate songs spliced together, with an ending that highlights Jaar's enduring knack for a well-placed sample. 'Rhizome IV' enlists jazz luminary Angel Bat Dawid and French electronic composer Mondkopf, and is led by Moor Mother's inimitable poetics and urgent line of questioning: "Can you see an invisible world / Can you see, can you hear, are you listening / Invisible worlds beyond the shadow."

Still want more? There's also a book that accompanies 'Rhizomes', featuring illustrations, an extended version of the album, a sample pack designed by Ssan, and additional tracks (all accessible via QR codes). This multimedia element points to Ssan's background in graphic design and film studies, and his previous work producing soundtracks for French television and film. Accordingly, the first and last pieces, 'Ouverture' and 'Fermeture', featuring Kenyan vocalist Nyokabi Kariũki, act like opening and end credits, neatly closing the loop on this ambitious, intricate work.

This is music that was never intended to be easy listening. 'Rhizomes' is an album that certainly isn't afraid to pose questions in its quest towards something and somewhere new, and in many ways philosophy is at the heart of Aho Ssan's work. For 'Simulacrum' he took concepts by the cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard as a starting point. 'Rhizomes' was inspired partly by the work of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and their idea of "an ever-evolving structural model, constantly in motion and spreading out in all directions at once".

The titular rhizomes, meanwhile, come from Ssan's interpretation of the works of French writer Édouard Glissant: "The root thought is the one that kills everything around itself, while the rhizome is the root that stretches out to meet other roots." The rhizomes here, of course, are the human connections. The energy generated by these diverse co-creative interactions and artistic partnerships lend a warming edge to Ssan's gritty, multilayered compositions. 'Rhizomes' is the sound of the zeitgeist, charting a hopeful path towards possible futures.

CLAIRE FRANCIS

RHIZOMES
AHO SSAN
OTHER PEOPLE

LABELLE
Noir Anima
INFINÉ MUSIC

Réunion islander Jérémy Labelle weaves two disparate musical elements together here as easily as thunder and rain. Still a distant French Department in the Indian Ocean, Réunion's delicately percussive, spiritually charged Maloya music is married with Labelle's other musical love – Detroit techno. Contemplative and febrile (see the beautiful 'Le Fil Vers', featuring Maloya exponent Hasawa), soaringly euphoric and, at times, even darkly propulsive – as on the standout track 'Danse Chamane' – it all comes together so impressively that you'll feel you've found a new dance form entirely. **CG**

DEADBEAT
Kübler-Ross Soliloquies
BLKRTZ

Canadian dub techno producer Scott Monteith has always ensured his albums are varied pieces of work that go beyond fodder for DJ sets. This is no exception. 'Brick Stick Blick Blade (Anger II)' features offbeat percussion and the sonorous tones of reggae vocalist Black Noble Oluokun, while 'Things Fall Apart (Depression)' drops the beats altogether in favour of a synth wash, tiptoeing bass and distant sirens. It all works brilliantly as eerie, late-night home listening, though the cunning loops and instrumental motifs may haunt your dreams. **WS**

AMON TOBIN
Hole In The Ground
NOMARK

Given his proclivity for different personas, from Stone Giants and Figueroa to Two Fingers and Only Child Tyrant, you'd be forgiven for thinking it would be a long time before another album from the actual Amon Tobin arrived. But whereas his 2021 long-player 'How Do You Live' was astounding and complex, these six tracks feel much more spontaneous and to the point. 'Self Collider', a one-note drone improvisation, is an extreme example, while 'Pale Tundra' is a triumph of effective simplicity as strident, ascendent notes head for the skies. **BW**

THE ORB AND DAVID GILMOUR
Metallic Spheres In Colour
SONY MUSIC

The 2010 collaborative album 'Metallic Spheres' from British rave mainstays The Orb and Pink Floyd's guitar virtuoso gets a heady update here, and it feels much weightier and more immersive than the original. In particular, the 20-minute-long 'Seamless Solar Spheres Of Affection Mix' rides on a never-ending, deliciously slinking groove that anchors Gilmour's inimitable, sky-chasing tones. Apparently, Alex Paterson's intention was to make this remix version "like an Orb classic", and it's certainly a case of a job very well done. **CF**

TEETH OF THE SEA

Hive

ROCKET RECORDINGS

You know what you're getting with Teeth Of The Sea, right? Well frankly, since this instrumental rock trio are one of Britain's most underrated bands, clearly not enough people do. But even those already familiar with Teeth Of The Sea's work will be surprised by their sixth album. Amid the cinematic melancholia first unveiled on 2019's 'Wraith' and the post-rock storms the band have been brewing since day one, 'Hive' features their first use of vocals – on the Ladytron-esque electropop of 'Butterfly House' and the epic techno of 'Megafragma'. **PC**

CARS FROM THE FUTURE

Cars From The Future

IRREGULAR PATTERNS

This is a collaboration between electronic musician Andrew Spackman (The Dark Jazz Project) and saxophonist Richard Davies. The latter delivers highly expressive, attention-grabbing melodies to underpin Spackman's hopscotch rhythms, randomised electronic sounds and sharp left turns, which are as wild as ever, but pared back a little to allow your focus to rest lightly on Davies' playing. 'Magic Ballet Blues' and the title track are where they start stretching out, with spiralling passages that swirl around clusters of bleeping synths and clattering beats. An inspired pairing. **MS**

CLOCOLAN

Incide

REDPAN

With 'Incide' – which claims to house an "active internal landscape generated by the friction between human and machine" – Rhode Island musician Emlyn Ellis Addison (aka Clocolan) continues to explore the ontological themes established on his earlier albums. Given the weighty subject, in a lesser artist's hands the 23-track release could easily have turned out dull and laborious. Yet Addison's masterfully subtle work with tape machines and found sounds on otherworldly tracks like 'Recurse' and 'Hypercathexis' ensures that this is certainly not the case. **IB**

RADIOLARIANS

Radiolarians

KLANG TONE

Taking his name from a type of marine plankton, Radiolarians is the solo project of Stroud multi-instrumentalist Dave Cudlip. Recorded "quickly and spontaneously" on analogue synth and drum machine, this self-titled debut album is unbelievably good. Deliciously sombre mood pieces merge with bedsit electronics and undulating rhythms – think Harmonia with Autechre-like interjections and occasional transmissions from the Radiophonic Workshop's outer reaches. It's all killer, but for starters, check out the euphoric pulses of 'Medusetta Arcifera'. Limited to just 300 vinyl copies, this'll fly. **VI**

MALKA
Anatomy Of Sight
TANTRUM

This 10-track synthpop delight is the latest album from Glasgow's Tamara Schlesinger, aka Malka. Packed with complex electronic textures and rich vocal melodies, songs like the moody 'Flashlight' recall the sophisticated, darkly tinted electropop of Swedish artist Lykke Li. Elsewhere, as on the New Order-esque 'Tramlines', Schlesinger channels a retro vibe thanks to her synth experiments, including the Moog Grandmother and Arturia MicroFreak. Full of sparkling details and emotional twists and turns, 'Anatomy Of Sight' puts this hidden gem of a songwriter in the spotlight. **CF**

SIMO CELL
Cuspide Des Sirènes
TEMET

Parisian producer Simo Cell already hinted at brilliance with his 2021 'YES.DJ' EP, but his debut long-player goes well beyond what anyone was expecting. It's loosely a concept album about mental health where different tracks mark different levels of wellness. From the prodding kicks of 'Blow The Conch' and the eerie, smashed-up trap beats of 'Rapids', there are plenty of different speeds and moods here. And everything has a distinctively pushed-to-the-edge atmosphere that keeps you rooted to the spot, listening out for what comes next. A class act. **BW**

SLAUSON MALONE 1
Excelsior
WARP

Jasper Marsalis' multidisciplinary artworks explore definitions of identity – a particularly tricky topic when you're the son of renowned jazz purist Wynton Marsalis. If the Slauson Malone 1 alias puts some distance between Marsalis Jr and his family name, his third album runs in the opposite direction to his dad's trad jazz. The hip hop mix tape-style melange of electronics and lo-fi guitars sounds like the offspring of Madlib and Beck, while Jasper's introspective vocals on tracks like 'Arms, Armor' make 'Excelsior' as emotionally reflective as it is musically restless. **PC**

FIELD LINES CARTOGRAPHER
Phases Of This And Other Moons
CASTLES IN SPACE

"Standing on the surface of one of the moons of Jupiter, or perhaps observing a satellite of Uranus transit across its host planet…" Travelling from Lancaster to the outlying bodies of the solar system can't be easy, especially when Mark Burford has only a Buchla Easel Command synth at his disposal. But he's crafted an album of ambient tranquility with a splendidly sinister undertone, and tracks such as 'Fenrir In Retrograde' and 'Charon's Pull' stress the stark loneliness of this icily beautiful cosmic journey. **BF**

LE COULEUR - PHOTO: ANDY JON

LE COULEUR

Comme Dans Un Penthouse

LISBON LUX

Québécois trio Le Couleur are a sensation across the North Atlantic, where they've been putting out essential records for 10 years. 'Comme Dans Un Penthouse' is a collection of eight electropop tunes that dips into the space-disco universe French counterparts L'Impératrice inhabit so well. The centrepiece is 'À La Rencontre De Barbara', which is not only a nod to Cerrone's 'Supernature', but also to previous songs about the enigmatic, titular Barbara in the Le Couleur back catalogue, should you be tempted to dip into their colourful past. **JA**

MIDORI TAKADA / SHHE

MSCTY x V&A Dundee

MSCTY EDN

Featuring the talents of Japanese ambient pioneer Midori Takada and Portuguese-Scottish artist SHHE (Su Shaw), the curiously hypnotic soundscapes on this release were actually commissioned as a soundtrack for visitors to the V&A Dundee. Takada's three pieces are as delicately mesmerising as expected (the mellow, euphonious 'KI-KI-KI' especially), but it's actually SHHE's mesmeric track '~', inspired by the sound of the water surrounding the museum, that makes for the most meditative moment of all. **IB**

LEO ROBINSON

The Temple

PRAH RECORDINGS

The baroque harpsichords of 'The Serpent' set the tone for an album of morbidly elegant lyricism. "Skulls snap off from their respective spines by the long row of pines…" Robinson is a multidisciplinary artist from Manchester, and this powerful collection infuses Blakeian imagery with northern grit. 'The Wintering' is a nod to Bob Dylan ("What did you do, my skin and bone son? / I chopped all the tomatoes in Withington"), but Robinson's haunting baritone owes more to the drizzly Pennines than the dusty Midwest. Stunning. **BF**

ALLAH-LAS

Zuma 85

CALICO DISCOS / INNOVATIVE LEISURE

A well-honed riot act on the live circuit, here on their fifth studio album this compelling LA four-piece expand their sound with classy, if unlikely, aplomb. Largely eschewing their trademark hi-voltage garage-psych, they shift down a couple of gears into more expansive and considered cosmic-pop territory. There's a louche, swaggering quality to tracks like 'The Stuff' that evoke post-Velvets Lou Reed and John Cale, while the standout 'Sky Club' nods to Eno's mid-70s 'Here Come The Warm Jets' excursion into art-pop with an irresistibly offbeat, guitar-flanging, sunlit groove. Recommended. **CG**

MISS C-LINE & THE RABIDZ
Last Drop
SELF-RELEASED

Ezra Collective's recent Mercury Music Prize win emphatically lifted the lid on music's worst-kept secret – that jazz is not only back, but it's more thrilling, diverse and eclectic than ever. Hopefully it will open up avenues for outfits as epic as MISS C-LINE & The Rabidz, a Soulquarians-influenced quartet from Switzerland specialising in luscious soul jazz underpinned with fresh hip hop grooves. 'Last Drop' may not be eligible for a Mercury nomination, but at times – like on 'Burnout' with Casey Benjamin and Jay Jules – it's hotter than Venus. **JA**

HAUSCHKA
Philanthropy
CITY SLANG

German post-classical pioneer Hauschka (Volker Bertelmann) returns after a four-year spell of composing film music, with an album that channels positivity and kindness. The 12 pieces are all bathed in uplifting mellifluousness, with strident, determined piano chords and rich, complementary synth backings. That's not to say that this is a sickly-sweet affair – tracks like 'Detached', 'Science' and 'Limitation Of Lifetime' begin in thoughtful and emotionally restless territory, before ultimately resolving into something powerfully optimistic. Warm and tender sounds for cooler temperatures and darker days. **MS**

ACID DRONES
Acid Drones
OFFEN MUSIC

Acid Drones is a deceptively harsh name for the new project by Thomas Lea Clarke, aka MR TC, with this self-titled album channelling more of a wavy, back-to-mine mood rather than peak-hour club vibes. The head-nodding chugger 'Acid Drone 4' moves with a subtle flair that nods to the Düsseldorf influence of Vladimir Ivkovic's Offen label, while elsewhere Clarke – who recorded the album between Turkey, France and Luxembourg – draws on cross-cultural influences to craft a compelling suite of downtempo electronica. **CF**

SAM GENDEL & MARCELLA CYTRYNOWICZ
Audiobook
PSYCHIC HOTLINE

This engrossing audiovisual work melds avant-jazz, experimental hip hop and pulsing ambient electronics, with American multi-instrumental talent Sam Gendel wearing his Jon Hassell 'Fourth World' influences on his sleeve. Via 13 alphabetically named tracks "in conversation" with an accompanying booklet illustrated by visual artist Marcella Cytrynowicz, we're carried through a dizzying array of vivid cinematic scenes which play like echoes from deep space ('MN'), and later, like some esoteric ritual from an ancient rainforest. Mesmerising. **CG**

SEXTILE
Push
SACRED BONES

LA's Sextile – Mel Scaduto, Brady Keehn and Cameron Michel – return after a three-year hiatus with an album that has the same nail-biting intensity as merging onto the 405 freeway during rush hour. Fusing punk poise, spiky guitars, emotive synths and punishing beats that nod to industrial techno, electroclash and drum 'n' bass, key tracks like 'Contortion' and 'Lost Myself Again' are angry, but driven. And the harshly filtered acid inflections of 'LA DJ' feel ritualistic and malevolent, while joyfully evoking a vaguely remembered night of extreme partying. Wild. **MS**

LEWIS FAUTZI
Manner Of Death
FAUT SECTION

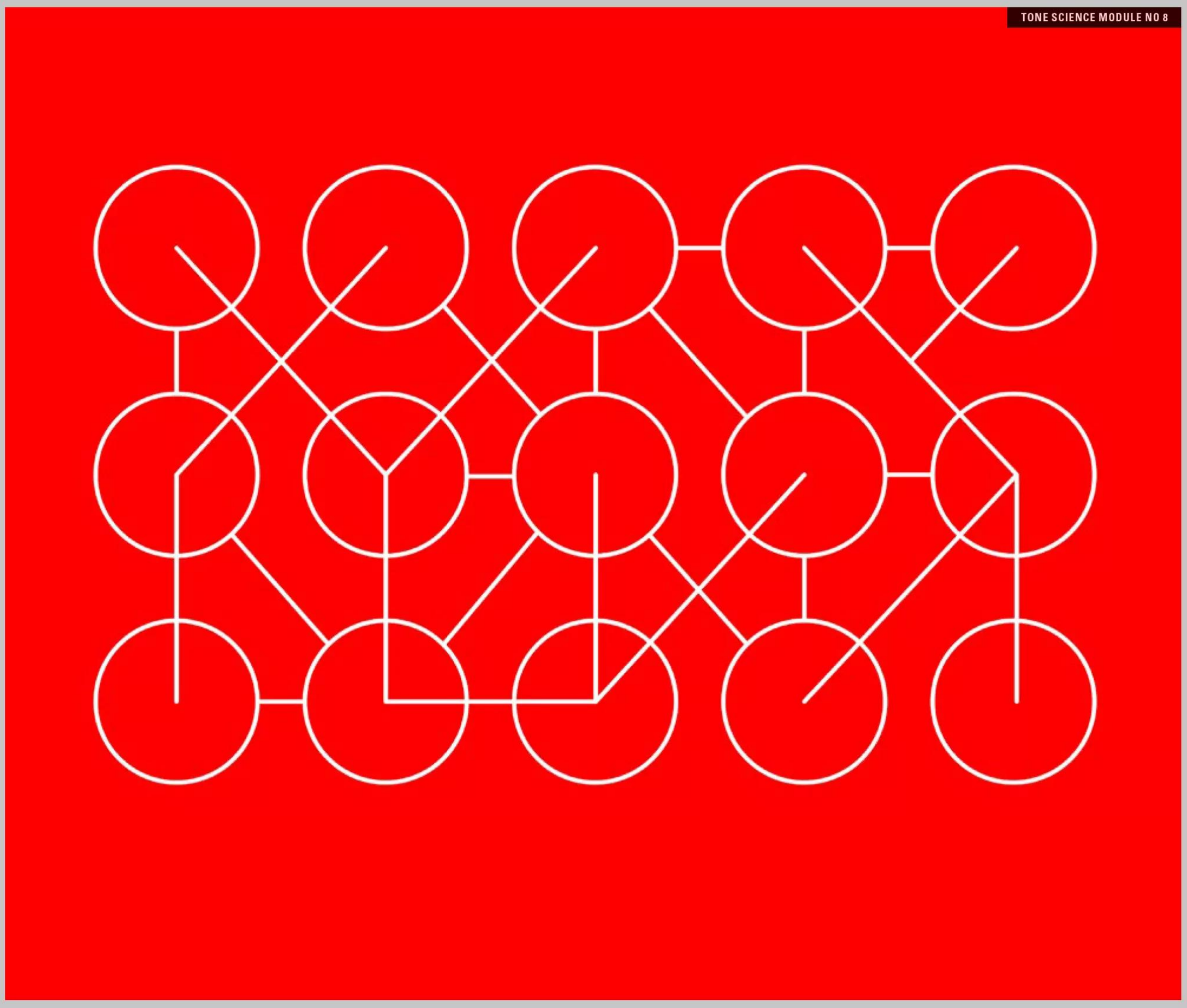
A life-changing experience was the catalyst for this latest release by Portuguese musician Lewis Fautzi. He's an artist best-known for his hard-hitting techno fare, but 'Manner Of Death' is a suite of eight lean, atmospheric tracks made after a serious accident in which Fautzi broke both his legs. The result is an understandably contemplative album, with the robotic, found-sound sampling of 'Science' and the ambient wash of 'DNA', in particular, revealing a more experimental and elegant side to his productions. **CF**

EUGLOSSINE
Bug Planet Is The Current Timeline
HAUSU MOUNTAIN

Florida producer Tristan Whitehill returns to his prolific Euglossine alias for an entrancing explosion of genre-mystifying, psych-electronica. 'Bug Planet' is restless, effervescent and kinetic, stuffed full of riffs and motifs. The glossy dubstep/breakbeat fusion of 'Ice Gel' is brief yet completely convincing, while the stop-start 'Salt' cascades out like shelf-ice breaking into uneven chunks, suddenly morphing into dilapidated UKG studded with prog rock guitar that evokes the skyward-facing licks of Tatsuro Yamashita. Brilliant at every turn. **FH**

GREEN-HOUSE
A Host For All Kinds Of Life
LEAVING

Nostalgia was first diagnosed in 1688 by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer, as the malady of soldiers sick with melancholy for their homelands. Los Angeles musician Olive Ardizoni's Green-House project (now a duo with Michael Flanagan) similarly yearns for times of environmental safety – a kind of ecological longing described as "solastalgia". On 'Desire Path' and 'Ferndell Shade', synthscapes are filtered through chlorophyll and moss, registering with a kind of bittersweetness that's like a soundtrack for Douglas Trumbull's 'Silent Running', composed by Portland musician Eluvium. **ST**



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Tone Science Module No 8: Tone Science Live

DiN

On 22 April this year, DiN sub-label Tone Science hosted their inaugural live concert at Liverpool's Capstone Theatre. The entire performance was recorded and is now being released as the eighth instalment in the label's eponymous modular synthesiser showcase series. Five distinguished musicians (including Polypores, Nigel Mullaney and DiN boss Ian Boddy) each present a semi-improvised "set" featuring a glorious array of richly diverse modular sounds. The finale, 'TSL Set 6', which is performed by all five artists, is the elegant, minimalism-inspired highlight. **IB**

HOWARD JONES

Celebrate It Together – The Very Best Of 1983-2023

CHERRY RED

Forty years after 'New Song', this four-disc retrospective is a pleasing reminder of the giddy window when mainstream pop got weird, and even spiky-haired chart stars came accompanied by interpretative mime acts in chains. Jones is our suitably idiosyncratic curator here, splitting the discs into 'Popular Hits', 'Electro', 'Chill' and 'Curiosities'. And while vintage synthpop gems like 'Hide And Seek' and 'What Is Love' still delight, there are newer charms to be found in the likes of 2019's bombastic 'Eagle Will Fly Again'. **BF**

HIHATS IN TREES

Artefacts

MALOCA

Belgian drummer and musician Lander Gyselinck is Hihats In Trees, and 'Artefacts' is his second album. Straddling the world of percussion, it rambles from gamelan-esque tuned objects on the stumbling 'Cedar Walk', to avant-garde interlude compositions, such as the insectile 'Miniatuur 6'. Gyselinck's polyrhythmic drumming dominates, and when matched with club-standard basslines as on 'C=N', the sound brings to mind early UK dubstep, checked by a conservatoire schooling and an unconventional approach – think Valentina Magaletti with Horsepower Productions and Mark Ernestus. **FH**

JP INC

Massage & Spa

ROPE WORM

'Massage & Spa', first released digitally in 2021 and now reissued here by Polish label Rope Worm, is a tongue-in-cheek album from LA comedian and Devo acolyte John-Peter "JP" Hasson. Designed for use in a relaxing spa setting, track titles like 'Warmed Towels', 'Hair & Scalp' and 'Sterilized Headrest' wryly mock the ambient genre, but Hasson's beatific music is almost indistinguishable from more "serious" works. The subtle 'Gentle Aromas' is so peaceful and enveloping that I almost felt compelled to check into a remote Swiss mountain health resort for a week. **MS**

ONIPA
Off The Grid
REAL WORLD

This collaboration between Nubiyan Twist's Tom Excell and Sheffield-based Ghanaian shaman Kweku Sackey, aka KOG, effortlessly mixes primordial rhythms with future sounds. KOG grew up loving everything from Tom Waits to George Clinton via Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and 'Off The Grid' happily splashes all of these influences onto a canvas so multilayered it's almost Cubist. 'Menua', featuring Lamisi, is sublime disco with joyous call-and-response, and 'Marching Over', featuring Dele Sosimi, traverses a polyrhythmic Afrobeat groove that becomes more emphatic with each bar. Impressive. **JA**

HIEROGLYPHIC BEING
The Moon Dance
APNEA

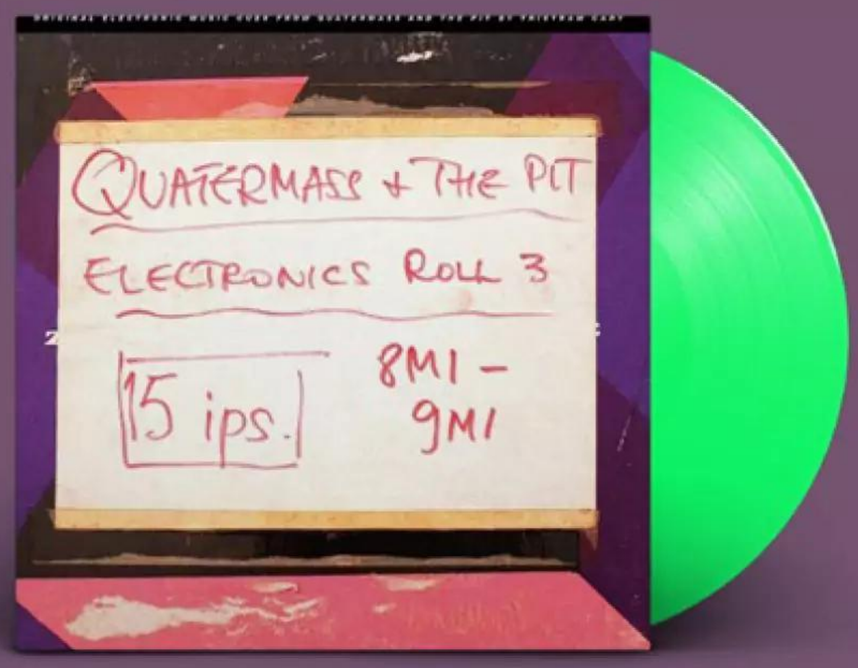
It'd certainly be a shame if this latest long-player from Chicago's Jamal Moss didn't reach a wider audience, as it's the most original album to emerge from the US techno genre in ages. The orchestral clouds and hi-frequency bleeps of 'Helium Three' are emotionally stirring as well as seriously groovy, and 'Purple Skies With Cotton Candy' takes majestic form from initial rumbling, and dislocated chaos. Elsewhere, there are bewildering cross-rhythms flirting with four-to-the-floor beats, hi-tech jazz flourishes, and a sense of the unexpected being made real. Awesome. **BW**

VOICE ACTOR
Fake Sleep
STROOM

Voice Actor, the Dutch duo of Noa Kurzweil and Levi Lanser, had a surprise hit last year with 'Sent From My Telephone', their epic sound collage of spoken word and fractured electronics. At 110 tracks and four-and-a-half hours, it was a mammoth listening experience, so here Stroom has made things a little easier. 'Fake Sleep' is a 16-track vinyl edition with updated versions of the standout pieces – like 'Slush 77' – plus three new songs. Just like 'Sent From My Telephone', this condensed version is best enjoyed in one languorous sitting. **CF**

ELEONORA
Tuuljamuud
CRUEL NATURE

On 'Tuuljamuud', Estonian-Latvian singer Eleonora Kampe – aka eleOnora – presents a suite of breathy vocalisations vibrating with delicate intensity. Recorded over a period of 13 years, the introspective minimalism of each track creates a meditative, almost religious tone. The album begins with 'Voice Improv With Wind At Unknown Location (2010 Edit)', an elongated, emotive vocal soundscape, though the standout track is 'Voice Improv Through Jaw Harp At Home (2013 Edit)', which unravels with creeping reverberation, like the sound of a choir drifting out of a deep cave. **ST**



THE RADIOPHONIC WORKSHOP
IN STOCK THIS MONTH

ELECTRONICSOUND.CO.UK/SHOP

STEVEN WILSON – PHOTO: HAJO MUELLER

STEVEN WILSON

The Harmony Codex

VIRGIN

The seventh album from Porcupine Tree's Steven Wilson is a spatial synth/rock/jazz/alt-pop odyssey, a cinematic confluence of peak-era Pink Floyd, Radiohead-esque noodling and Kate Bush-like wonder that really hits the heights. 'Beautiful Scarecrow' pounds with sinister intent, 'Actual Brutal Facts' is steeped in brooding trip hop, and the atmospheric title track could be Vangelis' 'Blade Runner' score from a parallel universe. To top it off, the deluxe version features "reimagined" tracks and remixes by Roland Orzabal, the Radiophonic Workshop and Meat Beat Manifesto. Utterly spellbinding. **VI**

VERYAN

Reflections In A Wilderness

WERRA FOXMA

The mysterious Scotland-based electronic musician Veryan explores wide open landscapes on this wistful, contemplative and utterly compelling album. Moving between the aching pastoral lament of 'The Light Without Love' and the elegiac joy of 'The Emptiness Of Inner Fields', she captures the aching power and beauty of solitude. The final track, 'Snow In Still', encapsulates the mood perfectly with drones, washes of ambient noise and triumphant synth strings. The joys of slow life perfectly captured. **MJ**

DAVID HARROW

Rare Earth Technology

BANDCAMP

David Harrow has worked with many different artists (Psychic TV, Lee "Scratch" Perry, Andrew Weatherall) and made many different types of music, but the disorienting delights of dub have never been far away from the core, regardless of genre. These days the LA-based Londoner is much more about the ideas of dub than trying to ape old styles, firing off delays and warping sounds over the laid-back grooves. From the slow-motion techno of 'Forwards Backwards' to the brain-numbing bassquake of 'Canyon Sound', this is compulsive listening. **BW**

THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Communication In The Presence Of Noise

NO TYPE

From his position as an AI researcher and critic, Eryk Salvaggio assembles his band, The Organizing Committee, for a wonderfully executed LP of kraut-poppy, picket-fence protest ballads that adroitly dissect current concerns around artificial intelligence. The hook? Salvaggio's the only one with a flesh-and-blood body – the rest of the production is by a suite of trained AI. 'Discommunication' is a riotous early highlight, while more serious warnings are mirrored in the looming synth leads and guitar of 'House Of Annetta'. **FH**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Heavenly Remixes Volumes 7 & 8
HEAVENLY RECORDINGS

The notion of a remix series that is onto its seventh and eighth volumes might sound like a barrel being forcibly scraped, but luckily, Heavenly Recordings have both the legacy and the imagination to prove this idea very, very wrong. The Hardway Brothers kick off the seventh compilation, working 'It's Over If We Run Out Of Love' by David Holmes and Raven Violet into a blissed-out anthem that's half-Moroder, half-'Screamadelica', before Horse Meat Disco do their sturdy, er, disco thing to Unloved's 'Mother's Been A Bad Girl', channelling both the spirit of Studio 54 and the Compass Point sessions of Grace Jones.

Elsewhere, Erol Alkan overhauls Confidence Man's gushing synths, superproducer Dan Carey turns in a delicate, string-swaddled take on Toy, and bleep heroes Forgemasters rejig Working Men's Club. Even better are the highlights of 'Volume 8', namely The Umlauts' mix of 'Howl' by Katy J Pearson – like Yello covering 'Blue Monday' – and unstoppable sleaze housers Decius reworking Eyes Of Others, but there's rarely a foot put wrong anywhere across this generous, 21-track spread. Heavenly indeed. **BW**

MEATRAFFLE
Base & Superstructure
BLANG

Hailing from the same south London scene as the Fat White Family, Meatraffle are prone to the same irreverent, bolshie high jinks as their counterparts, but done with synthesisers instead of guitars. On their third album, they're not beating about the bush. 'Base & Superstructure' is a class war concept piece, with a title referencing Marxist theory to boot. For those who like their art angry, here is a bellicose manifestation, with moments of psychedelia and mariachi horns in the breaks that really make it come alive.

'Secret Fizzy Wine Drinker' is fine pop, if you can get past the snark of the comedy chorus, and some points have to be deducted for 'Posh People In Pop' which puts the boot into Bryan Ferry, a pop aristocrat from working-class Geordie roots. Meatraffle apparently refer to what they do as "bastard music", and that mix of DIY electropop and attitude, with tongues firmly in cheeks at times, is marvellous when it works well, as on the New Order-like indie-disco of 'Robots'. **JA**

MOEBIUS
Aspirin
CURIOUS MUSIC

From the title track opener of this album, the evidence of the much-missed German master's sure touch – the squelchy electronic weirdness and the comforting tape hiss – is fully present. 'Aspirin' is shot through with electronic honks and blurts punctuating the disturbing mechanics of its uncanny Victorian automaton-like rhythms, as on 'Synthetic' and 'Providence', while 'Spiraea' has echoes of 'After The Heat' about it, Moebius' 1978 album with Eno and Roedelius. It wouldn't sound out of place on that boxset of early Devo strangeness that has just been released, sharing a macabre cartoonish humour with Akron's finest.

Fittingly, co-founder Mark Mothersbaugh's artwork graces the sleeve. It's a reminder of the connections – Devo, Eno, Conny Plank, Cluster, Neu! and Harmonia. Yet this posthumous release was almost a cast-off, a minidisc of ideas that Moebius played to American composer and regular Roedelius collaborator Tim Story. Story loved what he heard and worked on the tracks, resulting, nearly 20 years later, in 'Aspirin', but placed chronologically in Moebius' work just after the 2006 album 'Nurton'. Here's hoping there's more where this came from. **MR**

LAURA MISCH – PHOTO: SIAN O GORMAN

LAURA MISCH

Sample The Sky

ONE LITTLE INDEPENDENT

Laura Misch's debut album follows two lauded EPs that came out several years ago – 2017's 'Playground' and 2019's 'Lonely City'. Both are intimate bedroom recordings that mix tactile beats with Misch's honeyed vocals and smooth saxophone improvisations. Now we have 'Sample The Sky', which is effervescent and confident, with a strong sense of synergy where all the parts meld beautifully. It's a great advert for taking your time in order to make sure you get everything right.

Misch really steps up to the plate with the opener, 'Hide To Seek', evoking those rare records that enable you to float in the empyrean imagination. With titles like 'City Lungs' and 'Wild Swim', it's an album largely about metropolitans communing with nature at the edgelands of the city. As the title suggests, the sounds are largely samples and field recordings manipulated from scratch, with the assistance of composer and producer William Arcane and engineer Andrea Adriano. Together they've woven a whole enchanting sonic environment that's a pleasure to inhabit. **JA**

MARIA UZOR

Soft Cuts

CASTLES IN SPACE

Two years after Norwich duo Sink Ya Teeth quietly separated, Maria Uzor's long-awaited debut album offers a brilliant and unique slice of oppositional electro-noir. While the SYT synthpop and electroclash stylings are still evident, they are joined by an idiosyncratic mix of techno, indie-disco, and retro-leaning basslines and beats. It's all accompanied by Uzor's compelling vocals, which switch between shouty spoken word, twisted nursery rhyme and subtle humour.

Take 'Ventolin', which stitches 1950s sitcom-styled flute flourishes to driving mutant electro rhythms. Or 'Mighty Mighty', which offers high-octane acid grooves and a bassline that plumbs King Tubby-esque depths, while Uzor issues joyful "oohs", angry war cries and a personal manifesto. "This is my moment," she sings on the brooding and twisted music-box ambience of 'Facemask'. On the strength of 'Soft Cuts', Uzor's moment has only just begun. **MJ**

IVAN THE TOLERABLE

Under Magnetic Mountain

LIBRARY OF THE OCCULT

'Magnetic Mountain' is a 1933 volume of poetry by Cecil Day-Lewis, with its mysterious summit the symbol of a brighter, less conventional future. It's unclear whether Middlesbrough polymath Oli Heffernan was gazing idly towards Eston Hills when he made this darkly hypnotic album of psychedelic jazz-meets-library music, but the soft guitar lines and drifting saxophones of 'Opening Bell' encapsulate the same yearning for open spaces and clear heads.

Heffernan cites Delia Derbyshire and Holger Czukay as specific influences, and the likes of 'An Apology' and 'The Scale' boast suitably radiophonic swirls and mesmeric beats from Unit Ama drummer Christian Alderson. Elsewhere, Heffernan's own crisp guitars perfectly complement the impressionistic sax lines of long-term collaborator Ben Hopkinson. It's a combination most affecting on 'Feathers', an amniotic daydream underpinned by a throbbing bassline and – entirely appropriately – snippets of an ancient, crackly Sun Ra interview. He might modestly claim to be beneath the mountain, but this is Heffernan reaching an impressive peak. **BF**

JOHN CARPENTER
Anthology II (Movie Themes 1976-1988)
SACRED BONES

There are few filmmakers more adept at scaring audiences half to death than John Carpenter, best-known for writing and directing classics like 'Halloween' (1978), 'Escape From New York' (1981) and 'They Live' (1988). A prolific film composer – for his own movies as well as other people's – this compilation is the second in a series that aims to collect his most accomplished pieces.

One standout is 'Julie's Dead' from Carpenter's 1976 film 'Assault On Precinct 13', a quietly moody electro-piano piece that's delightfully of its time. Hardcore fans, though, will likely take the most pleasure from the three previously unreleased, helplessly eerie synth cues from 1982's 'The Thing' – 'Burn It', 'Fuchs' and 'To Mach's Shack' – all of which Carpenter composed after receiving Ennio Morricone's commissioned score and deciding that it didn't include quite enough material. Maybe not an album to play when you're alone in the house of an evening, but essential listening for film buffs all the same. **IB**

SAINT ABDULLAH & EOMAC
Chasing Stateless
PLANET MU

The second collaborative album between New York-based Iranian brothers Mohammad and Mehdi Mehrabani and Irish producer Eomac, and the follow-up to last year's 'Patience Of A Traitor', 'Chasing Stateless' makes for distinctly uneasy listening. Their base materials are samples from what sound like calls to prayer, political demos and TV news reports, looped and distorted as if they're being heard via a broken stereo. These are then fused with a variety of jagged rhythms, and the end result charges around with an intensity that's, at times, utterly overwhelming.

'Frequently Fugitive' features punishing gabba and 'Put By Nothing' and 'Of Christo' the clanging sound of industrial machinery. Amid the clamour there are a few pauses for breath, as on the eerie Boards Of Canada-like 'Hiccup', but for the most part this is an immersive, exhausting and exhilarating experience. The nearest point of comparison might be a 21st century 'My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts', lacerated and distressed for the confused and uncertain world we live in today. **WS**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Fabric Presents Helena Hauff
FABRIC

A vinyl obsessive with an old school aesthetic, Helena Hauff's 2018 album 'Qualm' is a solid primer for the raw techno and electro feel of her sets, which are as red-eyed and rough around the edges as you feel after a night stomping away to them. The Hamburg spinner's profile stands as far apart from many of her peers as her musical style does from the turgid tech-house that clogged up some of Fabric's older compilations from the series.

There are classics here, of course, such as Radioactive Man's 'Night Bus To Nowhere' and dynArec's 'Sunken Park'. Most of the records are from the last few years, but the squelchy acid bleeps, titanium electro beats and hardcore hoovers in tracks by Nite Fleit, Signal Type and Hauff's own 'Turn Your Sights Inward' could have been cloned from the dirty gunk you'd get coating your trainers at a 90s warehouse rave, and certainly not at a swish superclub. An authentic, powerful and idiosyncratic addition to the Fabric collection. **PC**

MARY LATTIMORE

Goodbye, Hotel Arkada

GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL

Life and loss in resonating strings

Classically trained American harpist and composer Mary Lattimore has over the course of her decade-long, five album recording career been inclined towards improvisation so far. Her singular, transportive style of ambient, experimental and post-classicism continues to build in breadth and stature. Here though, on her spellbinding, heartbreakingly evocative new long-player, 'Goodbye, Hotel Arkada', the six flowing pieces were put together in measured fashion over two patient years.

The hotel in question, which Lattimore has a great fondness for and which is currently undergoing radical renovation, is located on the Croatian island of Hvar – the place where she also clocked the 'Silver Ladders' that gave their name to 2020's stunning album .

The Arkada's faded glory and the memories it engendered spoke to Lattimore of life's ephemerality, its tragedy and beauty. On her most recent visit to Hvar, a friend told her, "Say goodbye to Hotel Arkada, it might not be here when you get back".

It was a moment that sparked Lattimore's creativity, with thoughts of how we try to capture and hold onto transitory experiences. The result is a major, perhaps career-defining work. The choice of collaborators only serves to emphasise this, with the likes of best friend and singer-songwriter Meg Baird (whose celestial hum adds a rare delicacy to 'And Then He Wrapped His Wings Around Me'), Slowdive's Neil Halstead and former Cure man Lol Tolhurst on board. They are people, who in Lattimore's words, "have deeply affected and inspired my life".

The results are as ethereal, entrancing and intricate as the stars. 'Arrivederci', for example, features an inspired synth turn from Tolhurst, and possesses a poignancy that's near-overwhelming. On 'Blender In A Blender', the guitar chords of New Zealand underground figurehead Roy Montgomery bring shimmering miasmas of gothic shadow that evoke the filigree sounds of Cocteau Twin Robin Guthrie.

The apex is found at the conclusion, though, with the febrile grandeur of 'Yesterday's Parties', tinted with a poised, Lynchian noir that builds to a devastating climax of emotion. Lattimore's cultivated strings refract so much that is out of reach, showering us in the nostalgia of a fading summer that becomes as manifest as the crumbling facade of that titular hotel. Magnificent.

CARL GRIFFIN

Shop Talk

Harpist and composer **Mary Lattimore** talks us through her record collection

Hello Mary! Can you tell us a bit about your favourite record store?

"My favourite record store is the Philadelphia Record Exchange. I'm really glad it exists. It's a legendary part of the Philly music scene. I've spent many afternoons drinking beers with the employees, hanging out at in-stores – I have also played there – and been introduced to great records that I cherish.

"I have this cool memory of taking Oren Ambarchi and Keiji Haino there to dig around for folk records, and hanging with Pete Swanson of Yellow Swans while he bought 'The Best Of Marcel Marceau', which was just silence then clapping. I always find great stuff there and get good recommendations, and it's so fun to linger."

How do you like to unearth new music?

"I really love going to record stores and the happy surprises you find when you're going through the new arrivals, and I love seeing the staff picks. I worked at a few record stores for a bunch of years in Rochester, NY and in Philadelphia, and have met some very cool, lasting friends just by being an employee and in the mix.

"Now, I also buy things online through Bandcamp, the web stores of record shops or sometimes Discogs, but I prefer to be in the store looking at everything. I find out about new music via friends and from reading reviews."

Have you ever purchased a record based on the cover art alone?

"Definitely! The cover art feels so important. I just bought the Morton Feldman record 'Rothko Chapel / For Frank O'Hara' that has this vibey photo of the Rothko Chapel in Houston. I feel like I can see how it sounds."

What's one rare album that you'd love to get your hands on?

"Maybe an original version of the Morricone soundtrack to 'Vergogna Schifosi'. I now really like finding Morricone records while on tour, and the theme from this film was played for me by my friend Will when he was DJing before my show at the Golden Lion in Todmorden. I made him play it twice because it really got in my head."

Finally, tell us a bit about your record collection

"My record collection is vinyl and cassettes, mostly. I think it's a good one. I have lots of the classics and interesting records from all over the world. Right now, I have some on the East Coast at my parents' home, and some on the West Coast at my place, but I'm planning a trip across the country to collect my dearest possessions very soon!

"My Eno records, my Cure records, my Alice Coltrane, Neil Young and Joni Mitchell records, Flying Nun stuff, my Slowdive – these have all kept me company for so many decades, so I'd say I cherish them like family members."

Buried Treasure

CHARLIE TATE

Alta Plana

OM, 2005

Without any announcement at all, Alta Plana appeared in 2005 as a digital-only release and promptly disappeared. I've never met a single person who's heard of it, let alone listened to it, but it's one of the most amazingly put together downtempo breakbeat albums I've ever heard.

Each track contains an astounding array of ambient detail – fireworks, street chatter, trains, a rainstorm, waves, phones ringing, bottles opening, people talking – and is also sublimely produced with crisp, kicking drums, great cymbal-work, sampled piano and strings, electric keyboards and deep-down bass.

The album opener, 'Dar El Salam', begins with the sound of a train rolling into a station. Then keys and a mind-bendingly deep bassline kick in, and the whole gorgeous thing takes off.

'Con Chin' is insanely catchy, starting with just shakers and bass, then developing into a very mellow groove based around a sampled conversation between an old man explaining to another man that the food he has to offer is free. It's full of loud birdsong and breaking waves, suggesting a tropical island. Who is Chin? And who is with him? It's a beautiful mystery.

'Inassire (Dub)' circles around the hilarious "harmonica" speech given by Jason Robards in 'Once Upon A Time In The West'. 'Don't You Know' is the smoothest track on the album and could well be an outtake by TLC. Other flavours on show are the reggae-ish 'Fe Regi' (featuring a sample from Barrington Levy's 'Here I Come') and the hip hoppy 'Ramsden Road'.

When I discovered Alta Plana, I tried to track Charlie Tate down. Who was this guy and what else had he produced? Maybe the cover photo would provide a clue? Where was that photo shot?

It was obviously some kind of salt plane. The title Alta Plana is Spanish for "high plane". Was that important? After a bit of investigation, I worked out that the photo must have been taken on the Uyuni Salt Flat in Bolivia, which is indeed high – nearly 12,000 feet high, in fact. That might account for some of the Spanish song titles, like 'Por Favor Adolfo' and 'Viva San Telmo', although San Telmo is confusingly in Buenos Aires.

Did Charlie Tate live in Bolivia? Or Argentina? Or maybe Dar El Salam (which is in Egypt and not to be confused with Dar Es Salaam, which is in Tanzania)? I've literally spent years trying to find out who or where he is, but have failed miserably.

Not only did the album sink without trace, Charlie Tate seems keen to leave no trace either. Whoever you are, would the real Charlie Tate please stand up and take a bow.

RICHARD SKINNER

VANISHING TWIN

Afternoon X

FIRE

Kosmische, post-punk wonderland

From its title alone, 'Afternoon X' suggests an album filled with a kind of everyday exoticism, an ambiguous place between loucheness and mystery, conjured from something completely unassuming and ubiquitous. I imagine a long-forgotten Robin Askwith sex comedy or something in black and white where a Professor Quatermass-type character discovers unspeakable things buried under the Thames. In fact, it's neither of those things – but also kind of.

Vanishing Twin are, in their current formation, the trio of multi-instrumentalist and singer Cathy Lucas, bassist Susumu Mukai and percussionist Valentina Magaletti. There has always been a sense of something spooky, unseemly or unsettling resting just beneath the surface of their dreamy textures. Their 2016 debut, 'Choose Your Own Adventure', is an album which describes Lucas' own vanished twin, absorbed in utero while both were still a bundle of cells.

That feeling is at its most pronounced here. On 'Afternoon X' they take the Duophonic Records shimmer of 2021's 'Ookii Gekkou' and inject it with a darker, denser elixir. These pieces are, largely, much more abstract and diffuse.

'Melty' opens the record into immediate eeriness, as incantatory chorals arc and swoop through the milky electronics. By the time 'Subito' brings things to a close, what started as afternoon has ended in a moonlit sky of reverberant voices and irregular chimes.

That said, there are moments where the trio allow things to settle into the fuzzy, percussive grooves they specialise in. 'Marbles' sets up a seedy strut which lurches and slinks through nocturnal streets, while the title track is a rhythmic daydream that registers close to the hypnagogic pop of Stereolab and Pram.

Such moments, however, are largely subsumed into a sound which, with each Vanishing Twin release, becomes increasingly disjointed and impressionistic. There's a ramping up of tautness and tension, as odd bits of everyday noise such as birdsong and household clinks and clanks merge into an almost sci-fi rumble.

The result is something which feels closer to a film score than a regular album. For 'Afternoon X', think Broadcast's soundtrack for Peter Strickland's 'Berberian Sound Studio', but the bits where Toby Jones chops up fruit unsettlingly.

SPENSER TOMSON

AZU TIWALINE
The Fifth Dream
IOT

If only Maria Muldaur hadn't already nabbed the title 'Midnight At The Oasis' for her 1970s jazz-funk favourite, it would have been perfect for the second album from Azu Tiwaline, who previously lived in Paris and has now relocated to a small settlement in the Sahara. The artist (Tiwaline formerly produced techno as Loan) has combined field recordings and traditional instruments from her current home with the kind of creeping nocturnal dread associated with UK bass music labels like Livity Sound, who released her 2022 'Alandazu' collaborative EP with Al Wootton.

Like both the desert that surrounds her and the dub that inspires her, 'The Fifth Dream' appears almost empty at first, with birdsong and pipes drifting over slow echoing beats, before the foreboding bass throb in 'Antennae Opening' builds into the jittery techno of 'Blowing Flow'. Yet even when an ironclad kick drum enters with 'Mei Long', it feels like a meditative mantra, meaning that if 'The Fifth Dream' is "world music" it's the sound of the world inside this astonishing artist's head. **PC**

GALYA BISENGALIEVA
Polygon
ONE LITTLE INDEPENDENT

The dark matter of Soviet-era nuclear testing in the vast Kazakhstan steppes, at the Semipalatinsk Test Site otherwise known as The Polygon "created more nuclear fallout than Chernobyl".

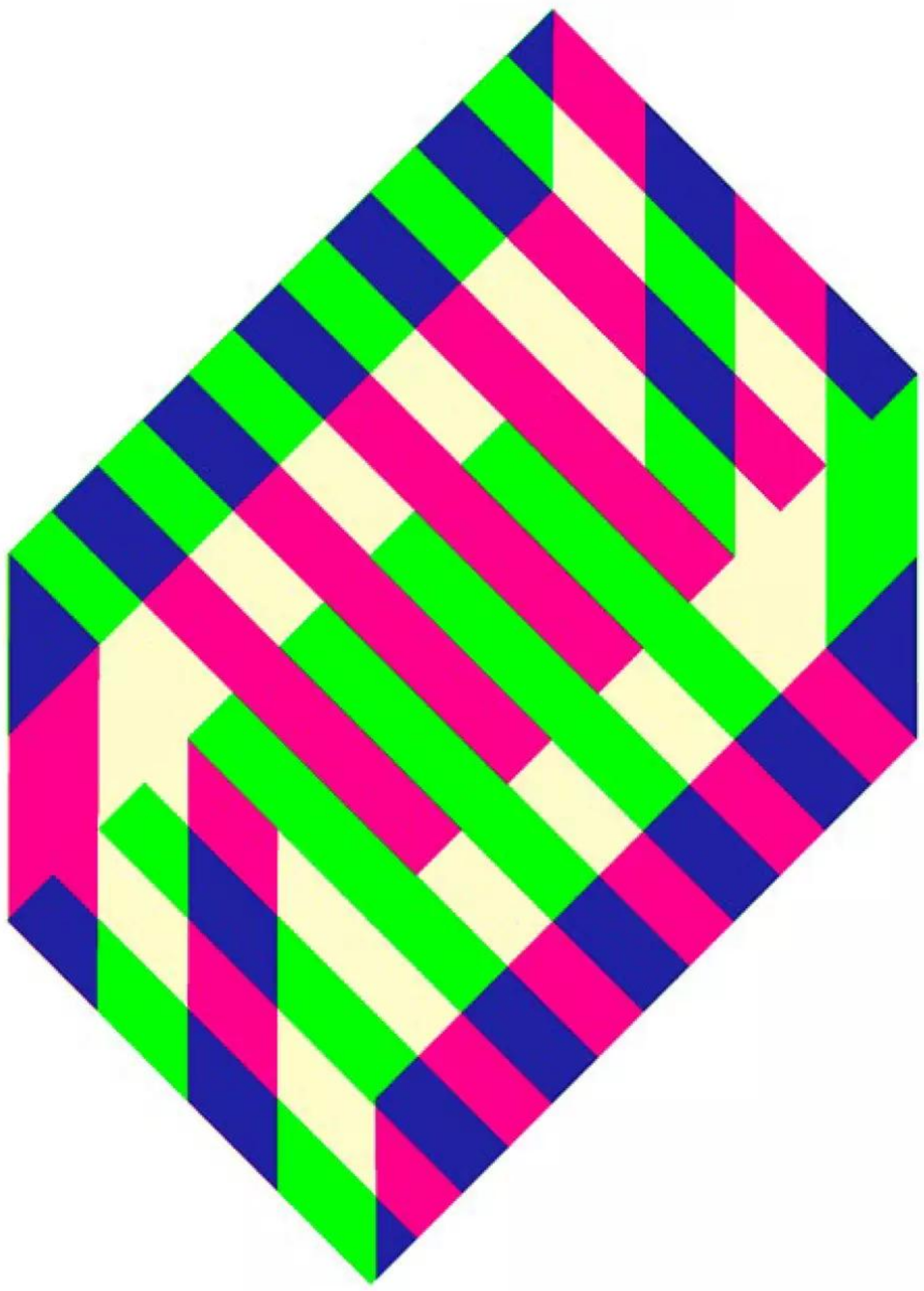
The subject is treated with astonishing interpretive verve here by gifted Kazakh-British neoclassical musician Galya Bisengalieva, the London Contemporary Orchestra violin lead in the middle of a glittering TV and film career that's seen her collaborate with the likes of Paul Thomas Anderson, Radiohead, Sigur Rós and The National.

This second solo release follows her stunning 2020 debut 'Aralkum', a meditation of the shrinking Aral Sea, and the brooding, string-led, subtly processed electronics on show here continue on closely from that record. Each of the seven tracks is named after places within The Polygon, including villages and natural features, and all are delivered with filmic tension. 'Chagan' is a masterclass, where pizzicato strings and distant echoes of Turkic folk are shrouded with fissile sub-bass. 'Balaplan' marks a short, propulsive mid-section before the devastating conclusion, 'Degelen', leaves you in no doubt as to Bisengalieva's mission. Awe-inspiring. **CG**

ROGER ENO
The Skies, They Shift Like Chords
DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

"In a lot of my music, hardly anything happens," Roger Eno told me when I interviewed him last year. Eno is a believer in removing superfluous detail, and this follow-up to 2022's moving 'The Turning Year' exemplifies his approach to extreme minimalism. He permits active silence and sparseness, as though they are instruments within the composition.

As with much of his music, 'The Skies, They Shift Like Chords' was inspired by the landscapes that surround his East Anglian home. More sonically complete than 'The Turning Year', the album benefits from the addition of a richer sound palette, while still remaining uncluttered. The standout 'Tidescape' features an enveloping guitar drone alongside Eno's introspective piano, while the haunting 'Above And Below (Crepuscular)' adds delicate synth tones, guitar and field recordings. Austere, yet delicately enriched with quiet details, listening to these pieces is like watching clouds passing overhead in slow and constant motion. **MS**



ASYNCHRONE
Plastic Bamboo
NØ FØRMAT!

French electronic jazz outfit Asynchrone is the joint project of Frédéric Soulard and Clément Petit. In 2020, they were inspired to take the works of Ryuichi Sakamoto into interesting new directions within the nu-jazz realm. They recruited artists like flautist Delphine Joussein to truly transcend, in an astral kind of a way, tracks like 'Differencia', which appeared on Sakamoto's avant-electronic solo album 'B-2 Unit' from 1980.

Crowd-pleasers and envelope-pushers are finely balanced here, and in the capable hands of Asynchrone, the patina on tracks such as 'Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence' is wiped away and what's underneath comes up gleaming. Moreover, the album is light on later works, though their rendition of 'Ubi' (from 2017's 'Async', from which they partly derive their name) is a moving take on one of the great Japanese composer's lesser-known moments. 'Plastic Bamboo' was never intended as a eulogy, but they've done Sakamoto proud all the same. It'll be interesting to see what Asynchrone come up with next. **JA**

COSMETICS
Baby
CITITRAX

Synthwave, darkwave, coldwave, call it what you will – this long-awaited debut LP on the dance-centric offshoot of the peerless Minimal Wave label hits the strobe-lit sweet spot at every thrilling turn. Cosmetics are Vancouver duo Aja Emma and Nic Emm, who formed back in 2008, releasing a couple of B-side singles two years later. But then they disappeared. Some readers might remember their blisteringly sinister underground banger 'Black Leather Gloves', from their 2010 seven-inch 'Soft Skin'. This early output promised much, but boy have they made us wait for more.

The breathy title track sets an ethereal, moody and seductive tone, and readies our ears for the primitive-sounding, ice-misted synth trails that follow. 'Pillow Talk' and 'Tell Me' have a blank allure, emphasised by Emma's sultry vocals, and combine the feel of early Soft Cell with the imperviousness of Chromatics' Ruth Radelet. The neon throb of 'The Look' gives a knowing nod to Suicide, while Italo disco and the shaded hues of Broadcast's electro-psychedelia are woven into the brilliant 'Ask Her', though every other track not mentioned is just as damn-near perfect too. **CG**

FANTASTIC TWINS
Two Is Not A Number
HOUSE OF SLESSOR

Fantastic Twins is the alter ego of French producer Julienne Dessagne, who doesn't appear to have a twin. This is a concept album of imagination and fantasy, diving deep into ideas of connection and conflict. Collectively, it represents a metaphor for the human condition, whether you're a twin or not.

Dessagne's template is the obtuse left-field techno of her adopted Berlin. That gives the standout track, 'Land Of Pleasure Hi Fi', a muted, tense and fleeting edge, deploying a crisp beat that is felt much more than heard. Sounds buzz and flutter with latent, unresolved potential. Voices float in and out unpredictably, creating a disorienting atmosphere that evokes mental instability and a loose sense of reality. Elsewhere, on the likes of 'Twins Can't Love', Dessagne hints at Berliner Billie Ray Martin, with anguished vocals pitched against emotive, urgent electronics. Complex and uncompromising. **MS**

MARTIN REV
The Sum Of Our Wounds
BUREAU B

Raw, early DIY cassette experiments

As one half of electro-punk pioneers Suicide, Martin Rev's greatest gift to music was economy, in both expression and execution. And if you're craving more of his ultra-reductive rock 'n' roll, this album of cassette recordings from 1973 to 1985 is the answer to your prayers.

Although Rev was part of a Suicide journey that lasted 46 years, this album works well without the crooning of Alan Vega. By gaining admittance to Rev's archives, we're treated to a blizzard of distorted, primal brilliance that evolves life on Manhattan's desolate downtown streets.

'The Sum Of Our Wounds' reminds us that Rev's early music was a product of economic deprivation, as well as unique vision. His revolutionary, lo-fi growl was wrought from electronic cast-offs – wheezing organs, effects boxes and primitive, non-programmable drum machines.

This lo-tech/no-finance arsenal meshed into a menacing singularity that was credited simply as "instrument" on Suicide's now-legendary first LP. It's no coincidence that his sonic reductions bear kinship with the early records of fellow New Yorker Philip Glass. Both used cheap keyboards and brutalist repetition as an expression of nervy, pent-up angst.

'Yearning' opens the album with a slushy rumba beat and a dusty organ playing a melody that feels spectral and eternal. Hearing 'Dreams', Suicide's 'Dream Baby Dream' shorn of its vocals, is like greeting a long-lost friend – reassuringly familiar, but somehow transformed.

The power drive of 'Laredo' features shattered fragments of slide guitar and a rock 'n' roll riff that Rev mutates into a minimalist maelstrom. 'Rio Grande' is equally stark and propulsive, providing a blueprint that electro anarchists Cabaret Voltaire would adapt to their own nag-nag-nagging needs.

No track here exceeds three-and-a-half minutes, even though you'd be happy to linger longer in the nicotine-stained ambience that many of them conjure. 'Whisper', the album's finale, is a pretty love song, with Rev tenderly cooing heartfelt lyrics over dreamy fuzz.

Although he has released a number of solo albums over the years, 'The Sum Of Our Wounds' condenses the impact of this artist at his gritty, grimy best.

SCOTT BLIXEN

Label Profile

Label: Maloca
Location: Brussels, Belgium
Est: 2020

Potted History: "Maloca is a worldwide community and record label based in Brussels," explains founder Fabien Leclercq, who also makes music as Le Motel. "Our first official release was on 20 January 2020, but I'd had this project in mind for a few years already.

"Around 2014, I started to receive messages on SoundCloud from Cosmic Composition in New Zealand and TAR in LA. It meant a lot to see that people from another corner of the planet believed in my music and were asking to release it. I felt blessed, and I knew one day that I would start a new label that could connect people from all around the world through music. To me, Maloca is more like a community than a personal project. I'm also a graphic designer, so the visual aspect is very important and connected with the music."

Mission Statement: "The Maloca ethos is to build bridges, interlinking disparate, like-minded musicians who are dedicated to blending organic, electronic and acoustic elements. This is a very open definition and I want it to stay that way.

"Artistic direction and cohesion are very important to me, but really any music that can be defined as 'hybrid' has my interest. This linking process is very important. Links can be created between producers and musicians all around the world, and the idea is to make them experiment outside of their comfort zone, to create something new and different from their solo universe."

Key Artists & Releases: "Our latest release is by Lander Gyselinck, aka Hihats In Trees. Lander is a friend and the best drummer I know. This album is less club-oriented than some of our previous releases, but it makes so much sense on Maloca, and I hope it'll reach the ears of people from other scenes because it's very special.

"Other artists include Farsight, Howie Lee, Griffit Vigo, DJ JM, Yuto Takei, Omaar, Dengue Dengue Dengue and Nick León."

Future Plans: "We are working on a big 'Various Artists' compilation coming out in December. Some contributors are newcomers, some are veterans, some are friends or just musical crushes, but they are all connected in a way, and I wanted to put them together on this project. The artwork will be made by the very talented painter Anastasia Bay."

Any Other Business? "Don't do this for money. Only start if it's really coming from your heart. It's a beautiful, passionate and fun journey but it requires self-discipline and a lot of hard work. It's also important to be surrounded with friends and collaborators. I launched this label on my own, but it's a very collaborative project in the end."

For more, visit maloca.bandcamp.com

First And Last And Always

Portuguese musician and producer **Lewis Fautzi** on the first and last albums he bought, plus an all-time favourite

FIRST

PLASTIKMAN

Consumed

MINUS, 1998

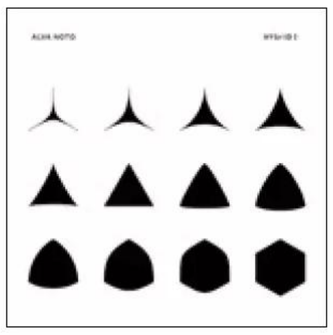
"This album still makes me feel the same way as the first day I heard it. It's simple, beautiful and deep. Richie Hawtin is a pioneer in the field, and I think that electronic music owes him a lot. There are no recent releases under his Plastikman name, but his old works keep on being masterpieces and are seen as influential by many."

LAST

ALVA NOTO

HYbr:ID I

NOTON, 2021



"I'm just a big fan of Alva Noto – he always sounds super-futuristic and uplifting. I always look for inspiration from a lot of different artists around the world, and Alva Noto is definitely one of them."

ALWAYS

APHEX TWIN

Selected Ambient Works 85-92

APOLLO, 1992

"I still play this one in my car. I have this feeling of being in a dream when I'm travelling and listening to it. Aphex Twin has a unique ability of keeping up-to-date, even if he has come a long way since the project began. Being capable of updating his style in line with the evolution of music, while being an upfront master in the scene, says much about his work."

STARS OF THE LID

The Tired Sounds Of Stars Of The Lid /
Stars Of The Lid And Their Refinement Of The Decline

KRANKY

Enigmatic masterpieces reissued

As Stars Of The Lid, pioneering drone/ambient/contemporary classical duo Brian McBride and Adam Wiltzie produced beatless, expansive and transcendent soundscapes that felt like otherworldly meditations. Following McBride's recent passing, these timely reissues of their groundbreaking 'The Tired Sounds Of Stars Of The Lid' and 'Stars Of The Lid And Their Refinement Of The Decline' albums – widely considered to be their best work – serve to remind us of the duo's immeasurable genius.

Formed in Austin, Texas in 1993, McBride and Wiltzie (also of Aix Em Klemm, The Dead Texan and latterly, A Winged Victory For The Sullen) cited the likes of Erik Satie, Arvo Pärt, Zbigniew Preisner, Gavin Bryars, Henryk Górecki, Brian Eno, Talk Talk and Labradford as primary influences on their distinctive sound. It's quite the list, but Stars Of The Lid always operated very much on their own terms.

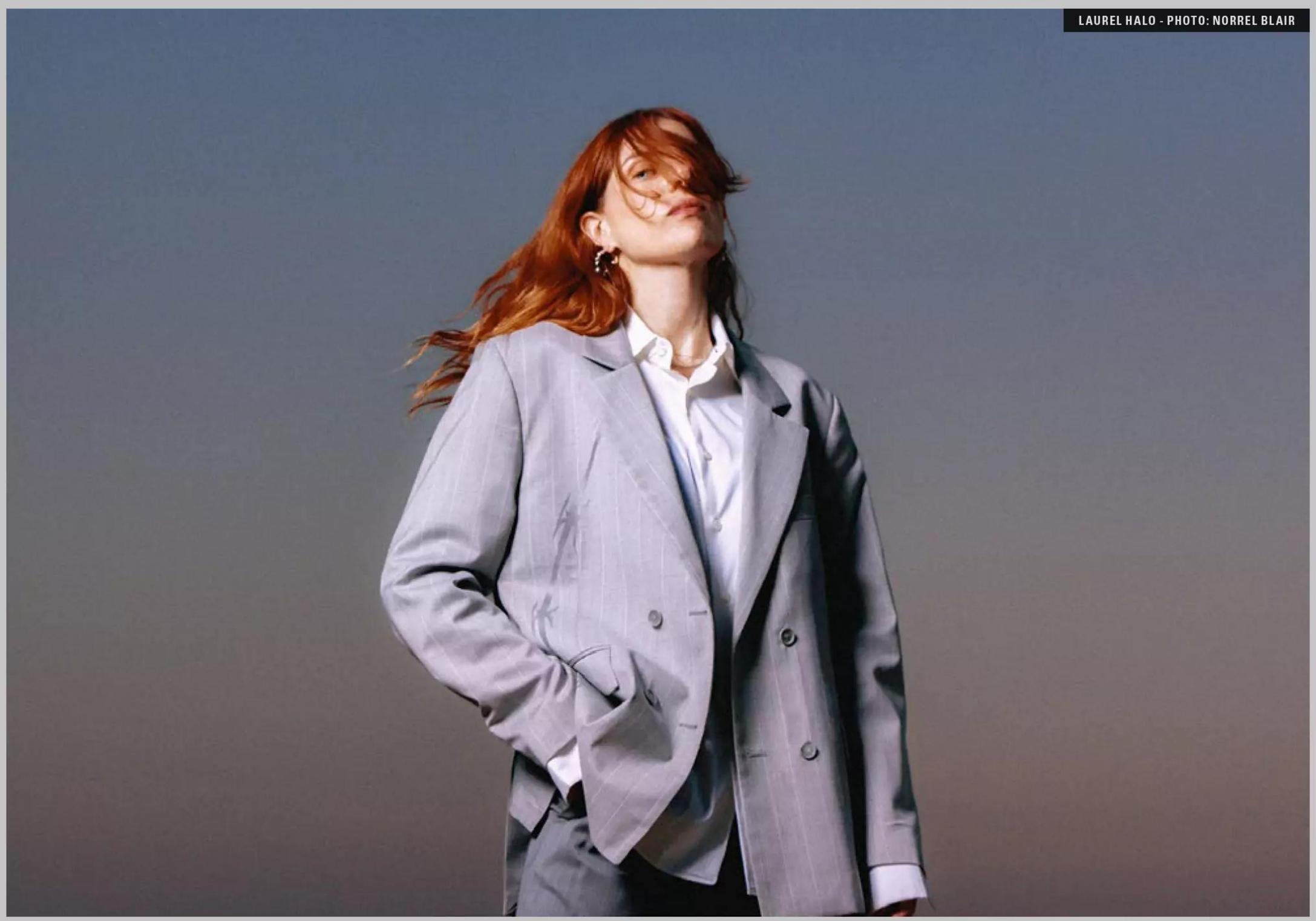
Released in 2001, 'The Tired Sounds' is a sprawling exploration of ambient minimalism, its title perfectly encapsulating the inherent mood, like the gentle sigh of a weary world. Enhanced by delicate orchestration, heavily treated guitars and resonant drones, the 'Requiem For Dying Mothers' suite and the sonorous 'Mullholland' evoke a deep sense of dreamlike serenity and introspection.

The follow-up, 2007's 'Refinement Of The Decline' is an equally understated masterpiece that fully showcases SOTL's mastery of texture, tone and timbre. Tracks such as 'Articulate Silences, Part 1' and the intriguingly titled 'December Hunting For Vegetarian Fuckface' are hauntingly beautiful, their melancholic, languid feel invoking real nostalgia and longing.

But beneath all that, there's the meticulous attention to detail. Every note, layer and subtle dynamic shift seems to serve a purpose as McBride and Wiltzie create vivid impasto canvases of sound, like painters obsessing over each and every brushstroke. In that sense, these defining long-players stand as monuments to SOTL's artistic genius. But there's no rushing this stuff. Their work demands patience and a willingness to embrace the long game. In return, the reward is a thoroughly profound and intensely emotive listening experience.

According to Wiltzie, there are more unreleased SOTL recordings in the vault, which he is hoping to put out as a sort of closing chapter at some point. For now, though, just stop all the clocks, let time stand still, and wholly lose yourself in SOTL's vast and exquisite sonic universe.

VELIMIR ILIC



LAUREL HALO - PHOTO: NORREL BLAIR

LAUREL HALO

Atlas

AWE

American electronic musician and Hyperdub affiliate Laurel Halo launches her label Awe with 'Atlas', her first album-length venture since the 2020 score for the Danish film 'Possessed'.

After reacquainting herself with the piano that same year, Halo went on to hold a 2021 residency at Pierre Schaeffer's Ina-GRM Studios in Paris, where her electroacoustic inspirations converged with recorded sketches. The bones of 'Atlas' were constructed by bending and elongating those early recordings, forming static-struck refrains of pieces like 'Belleville'. Not dissimilar to the hallowed experience of The Caretaker's music, a warped record plays a ghost of Coby Sey's voice, accompanying a violin's mixed joy and sadness through the walls of the next room.

Several collaborations add to the weight of this adventurous piece. Lauded saxophonist Bendik Giske flutters into the infinitesimal crescendo of 'Abandon', while the radiant title track features a complete chamber music ensemble, with string overtones from James Underwood and the thrum of Lucy Railton's cello pinned together by Halo's sombre keystrokes. A serene album that flirts with modern classical and ambient, without ever becoming too subsumed by either. **FH**

ELIZABETH PARKER

Future Perfect

TRUNK

Following in the footsteps of Delia Derbyshire, former Radiophonic Workshop engineer and synthesist Elizabeth Parker has never really been given her due, despite a hefty portfolio of sound design for TV (including seminal BBC sci-fi series 'Blake's 7' and 'The Day Of The Triffids'), film and radio over almost five decades.

This new 26-track collection of her work seeks to rectify that. Featuring early tape experiments, home demos and non-BBC projects from the 1970s to the late 2000s, and conveying Parker's obvious love of experimentation, 'Future Perfect' delves into her considerable archive with gems aplenty, as you might expect.

The ghostly 'Siren Call' sounds like an outtake from the chilling 1977 children's TV series 'Children Of The Stones', while 'The Killing Skies' – manipulated recordings of boat wires whistling in the wind – feels like incidental music from prime-time 1980s 'Doctor Who', with Daleks poised to attack. And as its title suggests, 1983's 'Congestion Hoe-Down' is pure, unadulterated fun, just to lighten the mood a little. A total blast. **VI**

ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK

Bauhaus Staircase

100 PERCENT

Throughout their 45-year tenure as Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark, Andy McCluskey and Paul Humphreys have been purveyors of everything from infectious, intellectual synthpop to dreamy, dance-infused electro.

'Bauhaus Staircase' is the band's 14th studio album (and possibly their last), and once again it sees the pair carving out a fresh sound for themselves that's still very much within the OMD mould. McCluskey's vocals are simultaneously tender and commanding, while Humphreys' synth melodies are as yearning and melancholy as ever. The album's title track makes for a surprisingly biting lead single ("I'm gonna kick down fascist art"), but tracks like the uplifting 'Look At You Now' and the despairingly bittersweet 'Veruschka' best show off the affectional, lyrically rhapsodic sound that 'Bauhaus Staircase' is really built on.

If this album is to be OMD's last full-length release, it surely proves that the disbandment of this endlessly innovative and undeniably ingenious group will be felt greatly by the wider world of electronic music. **IB**

GLOK

Gateway Mechanics: Live Electronic Sound

ELECTRONIC SOUND

Glok, Andy Bell's electronic project, is brilliantly captured here as it takes flight in session at the Electronic Sound studio. It positions him as a kind of British Michael Rother – a guitar guy at ease in the experimental electronic underground (in Bell's case, this is very much despite his lengthy tenure as a member of the famously fractious stadium botherers, Oasis). His day job as co-founder of Ride makes absolute sense of his move into the multidimensional world of electronic music.

Shoegaze and electronica share the urge to create new sonic landscapes, and this album – a swirling hybrid of electronics and verdant guitar played live in one take – proves the point. In 'Memorial Device', Bell's guitar howls and keens over a loping electronic scree of scratches and scrapes. It continues into 'Cloud Cover', where melodies start to emerge in lush flower bursts of synth and white noise snares, while the drive of 'Projected Sounds' takes the krautrock biscuit. The tracks swirl and merge, cutting and splicing motorik of the early 1970s with 1990s shapeshifting guitar and the permanent pulse of electronic music. **MR**

EMMA ANDERSON

Pearlies

SONIC CATHEDRAL

"Been in the warming sun alone / Swimming through space when time's postponed / See if I can make it on my own". It's 35 years since Emma Anderson founded shoegaze behemoths Lush, and she's also spent a decade as precisely 50 per cent of dreampop duo Sing-Sing. It's not a bad grounding on which to build a solo career, but the lyrics of the Farfisa-drenched opener, 'I Was Miles Away', suggest the experiment still feels somewhat tentative.

There's no need to sound so uncertain, though. It's a terrific album. Anderson and producer James "Maps" Chapman have crafted a crisply contemporary take on British psychedelia, with Suede's Richard Oakes lending tastefully trippy licks and Anderson's gossamer vocals hitting their mark with a deceptively steely confidence.

"The road is empty, the sky is black / Makes no sense to be turning back," she sings amid the charming shuffles of the earworm single 'Bend The Round'. It's a determined mission statement on an album of melodic delights. **BF**

GAZELLE TWIN

Black Dog

INVADA

Gazelle Twin is Elizabeth Bernholz, a musician, visual artist and producer hailing from Brighton whose past achievements include remixing John Foxx, writing music for The Walking Dead and collaborating with the likes of Gary Numan. Her solo work tends to sit somewhere between soaring art-pop and intricate avant-garde electronica, often looking at the world around us and tackling themes of collective identity.

Her latest offering, 'Black Dog', retains the musical characteristics of Gazelle Twin's earlier work but takes on a rather more introverted air, with Bernholz turning the spotlight on her childhood to create murky but spirited compositions. The opening track, 'I Disappear', is an ominous five-minute hum of writhing synthesisers framed by doom-laden vocals, while interlude-type moments like 'Sweet Dream' and 'The Long Room' hiss with fragile nostalgia and balance out the weighty menace of longer tracks.

Deeply unsettling and confrontational, 'Black Dog' is not an album for the faint-hearted, although it will undoubtedly please those who have been waiting to hear a more confessional side of this innovative artist. **IB**

JUNKBOY

Littoral States

WAYSIDE AND WOODLAND RECORDINGS

Brothers' nature-informed folktronica

Some records belong firmly to the "big" seasons, their songs either drenched in summer sunshine or coated in a crunchy layer of freshly fallen snow. 'Littoral States' falls charmingly between the gaps, lit up by the pale, steely skies of springtime and the syrupy sunshine of slow, autumnal afternoons.

In 2020, brothers Mik and Rich Hanscomb lost their father. The album is a bittersweet ramble in his memory, an elegant pootle along the south coast of England, and the scattered home towns of all three men. 'Cormorant At The Mouth Of The Ouse' is our breezy starting point, its wistful fingerpicking accompanied by the kind of mellifluous strings that once lent Nick Drake albums such an air of stately melancholy. 'Witch Of The Watery Depths' adds the crystalline vocals of Sussex folkie Hannah Lewis and keening folk-rock electric guitars.

Lewis is the unsung star here, providing two sympathetic lyrical contributions and a strident voice that may raise goosebumps for anyone still haunted by Toni Arthur's ethereal 1960s folk vocals. "Once upon a forest, sunlight beams / Nature's blossoming, it must be spring," she sings on the breezy 'Chase The Knucker', while 'The Sea Captain' is grief with open-hearted dignity: "I'd sell my soul to the waves that flow / To reach you."

There are tranquil field recordings (sometimes made in *actual* fields), immaculate guitars and strings that flow with effortless grace. From Hanscomb Snr's birthplace, Bognor Regis, we roam through the urban sprawls of Brighton and Newhaven to the coastal suburbia of Seaford. By the time we reach the impudent banjo and recorder of the concluding track 'Tall Grass', our flushed complexions and pleasantly aching calves are testament to the joys of an afternoon well spent.

It's certainly a worthy sequel to the Hanscombs' similarly exquisite 2019 collection, 'Trains, Trees, Topophilia'. Their own modest description of their efforts? "Music that finds solace and joy in the beautiful banalities." If such banalities include a stirring walk in celebration of a loved one who – not so long ago – would have been a willing and welcome companion, then they've succeeded with no little joy and an absolute surfeit of the aching beauty they've been chasing all across the South Downs.

BOB FISCHER

FOREST SWORDS

Bolted

NINJA TUNE

Muscular electronics from the factory floor

The murky atmosphere Matthew Barnes evoked in tracks like 'Hoylake Misst' and 'Red Rocks Fogg' on his early EPs has never really lifted from the music he makes as Forest Swords – it's just changed form.

The hauntological electronica of his 2013 debut full-length, 'Engravings', peered at the folklore of his Wirral home through the mists of time, while 2017's follow-up 'Compassion' battled through the smog of digital disinformation choking the modern world. Even 'Shrine', his 2016 ballet score, which was based around human breathing occasionally resembled someone coughing in a thick peasouper.

That brings us to 'Bolted', which looms out of a gloomy miasma like a factory belching toxic smoke. Possibly the very abandoned factory in Liverpool where Barnes produced it, although the relentless mechanical sounds throughout makes it feel like his studio was a heavy industrial plant still very much in operation.

"Industrial" is the watchword, not just in the obvious influence of Psychic TV or early On-U Sound act The Missing Brazilians. Every sound feels like it's been either shredded or crushed out under immense pressure – from the barbed metallic rhythms of 'The Low', the Neneh Cherry sample on 'Butterfly Effect' and the distorted choral vocals of 'Caged', to the forlorn keys that hover sadly in the background of 'End'.

It's tempting to draw parallels between Forest Swords and Craven Faults, given that both artists have set up studios in former industrial spaces in the North and have an oblique fascination with their region's past. Yet, whereas the latter's music conjures up visions of windswept Yorkshire moors, 'Bolted' is the sound of crumbling concrete and polluted urban canals. This is encapsulated by the accompanying videos to 'The Low' and 'Butterfly Effect', which depict a Stygian underworld strewn with shopping trolleys and wrecked cars.

If that makes everything seem a bit dark and difficult, that's because it is. This is resolutely not an album to quickly pick you up or slowly wind you down. Barnes' elaborate sound design makes 'Bolted' resemble the demolition of a cooling tower. The collapse of a vast structure engineered by someone with complete mastery of their methods and materials, with the clouds of smoke and debris possessing an undeniable sense of grandeur that can take your breath away.

PAUL CLARKE

REVIEWS BY
JEREMY ALLEN,
IMOGEN BEBB,
SCOTT BLIXEN,
PAUL CLARKE,
BOB FISCHER,
CLAIRE FRANCIS,
CARL GRIFFIN,
FREDDIE HUDSON,
VELIMIR ILIC,
MARTIN JAMES,
MARK ROLAND,
WILL SIMPSON,
RICHARD SKINNER,
MAT SMITH,
SPENSER TOMSON,
BEN WILLMOTT

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

PHOTO: ARTHUR SAJAS

Vanishing Twin's **Cathy Lucas** steps up for this month's quick-fire questions

INTERVIEW: NEIL MASON

Hello Cathy, where are you right now and what can you see?

"I'm in Catus, a small village in south-west France, named for its cat population. It's night, so it's pitch-black. If the lights were on, I'd see a pitched roof of old oak."

Always enjoyed the fact that Ben Folds Five were a three-piece. Do people think you're real twins?

"I think people get that the idea is to think as little as possible about what's real."

For those who don't know the story behind the name, there's vanishing twin syndrome, which you were affected by when you were in the womb

"Vanishing twin syndrome is where one embryo is resorbed by its surroundings – including the other embryo – in the early stages of pregnancy. It's more common than we think – millions of us have a vanishing twin. When I was younger, I thought of it as a loss, but now I tend to treat it as a superpower."

Congratulations on the new record, 'Afternoon X'. Interesting title – what exactly is 'Afternoon X'?

"It was a record made across many afternoons. X is a moment, or many moments, when a crucial thing happened. But it's not identifiable. It's specificity and anonymity. It marks a secret spot."

Anything "X" seems a bit Elon these days, doesn't it? Which is a shame, as it's a useful letter

"He already owns too much. Let's not also give him a letter of the alphabet."

There are some lovely earthy track titles – 'Melty', 'Lazy Garden'… 'Brain Weather' caught my attention – tell me a little bit about that?

"Susumu, our bass player, named the track 'Brain Weather'. It's a translation from a Japanese idiom. I'll need to ask him again. It was a track with many iterations before it came to where it is."

The whole album has a very summery feel and yet it was recorded in the autumn and winter of 2022-23. How do you explain that?

"I don't know if I can explain that. Maybe we write about what's missing."

The record also saw the three of you working differently. You were more like co-producers than a band. How did that work, practically?

"Previously, we had been somewhat more stable in our roles, with me more or less producing. This time, we just came into the studio solo or in twos or threes and played whatever we felt like playing."

By the sound of your previous records, there was nothing wrong with the way you were doing things, so why the need to change your working practice?

"Some things did stay the same. We continued our love affair with the private studio. The sound of Vanishing Twin is massively influenced by the fact that we rarely work in commercial studios. But change was also inevitable. We're a three-piece now instead of four, and evolving as musicians and people."

You all got a bit multi-instrumentalist too. Did you surprise yourselves with any new-found musical skills?

"I'm constantly amazed by the musicianship around me. It's not really about technique though, much more about listening and tuning in."

The album came about through a series of "marathon recording sessions". Marathon in what sense?

"Making a record is always a bit of a marathon."

And the tracks were built from "a vast collection of instruments, samples and unclaimed sources"?

"We have a room full of stuff that is constantly evolving – bird whistles, radios and kola nuts are some of the smaller objects. We also have lots of different samplers and a collection of flutes."

Any unusual instruments in there you'd like to tell me about?

"There's a Maplin 3800 kit synth that my dad built in 1979, and we used Yamaha sampling keyboards a lot. The built-in microphone is your instrument, so suddenly any snatch of sound becomes musical when it's pitched across a keyboard. It's so immediate and playful."

And "unclaimed sources"? That sounds interesting. Any examples?

"The person next door practising scales, the strains of a choir from outside a church, mouth sounds, traffic sounds, internet sounds… mostly untraceable."

Is there a particular favourite noise on the record you'd like to mention?

"A friend sent me street sounds from Mexico on her phone for the final section of 'The Down Below'. We also used Pink Trombone – a virtual anatamo-physiological voice synthesiser – for 'Marbles'."

It says here that the album is "crafted from a playful balance of humour and rigour". Care to expand on that?

"I guess there's a rigour in putting three pairs of ears on something and not calling it finished until they're all happy."

There are some wonderfully cheeky moments – the birds tweeting the melody on 'Brain Weather' is brilliant. Anything you'd like to highlight for us?

"Somewhere on the record there's a mariachi band, chopped and screwed into a kind of cassette mash."

So who's the funniest person in the band?

"We're all extremely serious people."

Do you know any good jokes? Tell us your favourite?

"Are you a horse in a human costume? Yay or nay?"

'Afternoon X' is out now on Fire

CHORD

Chord Electronics Ltd.

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